THE LITERARY THEORY OF AYN RAND

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THE LITERARY THEORY OF AYN RAND

THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ayn Rand is one of the most controversial writers of our time. Her philosophical views are the subject of wide comment. Most of the comments come from people who dislike her political and religious views. Nevertheless, she has inspired admiration from many of her readers who now call themselves "students of Objectivism." Nathaniel Branden, one of these admirers, has written:

> At present, a person who is in agreement with our philosophy should describe himself, not as an Objectivist, but as a student or supporter of Objectivism. In any context where he is presenting his philosophical ideas, he should make it clear that he is discussing Objectivism as he understands it, and that he speaks for no one but himself.[1]

Objectivism is the name Ayn Rand has given to her philosophy because she claims to be "objective" in any attempt to understand the "facts of reality." Nathaniel Branden is without doubt this country's most knowledgeable admirer of Ayn Rand and her ideas. He has known her for many years, and she has often referred to him as her "intellectual heir." In any discussion of Ayn Rand's ideas, his name

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[1]Nathaniel Branden, "A Message to Our Readers," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (April, 1965), 17.

will inevitably be mentioned. Therefore, any statement made by him should be regarded as representing the same point of view that Ayn Rand herself expresses.[2] Nathaniel Branden's wife, Barbara Branden, has written the authoritative biographical sketch of Ayn Rand's eventful life.[3] These two individuals must be placed first in any list of admirers of Ayn Rand's thought. Ayn Rand has written:

> Please take the following as an official "Public Notice." The only authentic sources of information about Objectivism are: My own works. Who Is Ayn Rand? by Nathaniel Branden . . . The Objectivist Newsletter / now The Objectivist / . . . the lecture courses on Objectivism given by Nathaniel Branden Institute . . . and the publications of that Institute.[4]

This statement by Ayn Rand makes explicit the primary sources of any research work which would claim to represent her ideas authentically.

The lectures mentioned above by Ayn Rand are a series of courses given in person in New York City by Ayn Rand, Nathaniel Branden, Barbara Branden and their associates.

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[2]This chapter was written in the summer of 1968. Since that time Nathaniel Branden and Ayn Rand have quarreled over a philosophical issue. I do not yet know the cause of this disagreement. However, it does not affect the accuracy of statements made by Nathaniel Branden while he was in agreement with Ayn Rand.

[3]Barbara Branden, "A Biographical Essay: Who Is Ayn Rand?" in Who Is Ayn Rand? by Nathaniel Branden (New York, 1962), pp. 147-239.

[4]Ayn Rand, Los Angeles Times (August 26, 1962), cited in Nathaniel Branden, "A Message to Our Readers," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (April, 1965), 17.

These lectures are given throughout the United States and Canada, and sometimes in other parts of the world by tape transcription. According to a pamphlet published by Nathaniel Branden Institute, these courses have been given in over eighty cities throughout the United States. Courses are given on almost every subject that has been, to this day, related philosophically to Objectivism: philosophy, psychology, the plastic arts, economics. This thesis will be concerned with one of these lectures, the seventeenth lecture of a twenty-lecture course titled "Basic Principles of Objectivism." In this lecture Ayn Rand discusses some of her views on art in general and literature in particular.

Because Ayn Rand's aesthetic views are a part of her total philosophical system and can be accurately understood only if seen in the broader context of that philosophy, a definition of Objectivism is necessary before her aesthetic views can be understood. Ayn Rand has humorously defined Objectivism in this manner:

> At a sales conference at Random House, preceding the publication of Atlas Shrugged, one of the book salesmen asked me whether I could present the essence of my philosophy while standing on one foot. I did, as follows:
>
> 1. Metaphysics: Objective Reality
> 2. Epistemology: Reason
> 3. Ethics: Self-interest
> 4. Politics: Capitalism[5]

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[5]Ayn Rand, "Introducing Objectivism," The Objectivist Newsletter, I (August, 1962), 36.

She then translated the above classification into more vivid terminology:

> 1. "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed: or "Wishing won't make it so." 2. "You can't eat your cake and have it, too." 3. "Man is an end in himself." 4. "Give me liberty or give me death."[6]

If this does not make her position clear, she attempts to reveal her meaning even more explicitly. She says in reference to metaphysics, "Reality exists as an objective absolute--facts are facts, independent of man's feelings, wishes, hopes or fears."[7] Her epistemology is based on reason, which she defines as ". . . the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses."[8] Reason she regards as ". . . man's only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival."[9] Ayn Rand's ethical position is a widely discussed, very controversial one. She writes:

> Man--every man--is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.[10]

Ayn Rand's strong ethical stand has resulted in a strong stand on political theory. As previously mentioned, she

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

supports laissez-faire capitalism. However, she uses the term differently than it is ordinarily used.

> It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. The government acts only as a policeman that protects man's rights; it uses physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use . . . .[11]

From the preceding summary of Objectivism, it can easily be seen that Ayn Rand takes strong, definite stands. "Students of Objectivism" praise her for her opinions, but other persons who hold different opinions attack her, sometimes violently. Some of these attacks have come from reviewers of her novels.[12] Attacks have come primarily from people who dislike her support of laissez-faire capitalism or who dislike her condemnation of religious beliefs. (She is a professed atheist.)[13] Some attacks are based on her crusading absolutist approach to problems. Yet even her most bitter literary and philosophical enemies would surely in all fairness have to admit that she is one

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[11] Ibid.

[12] For a discussion of the opinions of critics, see the first chapter of Sue Evelyn Coffman's "Howard Roark as Hero," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1965, pp. 1-8.

[13] Nathaniel Branden, "Intellectual Ammunition Department," The Objectivist Newsletter, I (May, 1962), 19.

of the important figures in the literature of the middle decades of the twentieth century. She has published four novels. We the Living (1936), her first novel, is the story of three individuals who struggle psychologically and physically to save their lives in the face of the Communist dictatorship of Soviet Russia in the early 1920's. It was a financial failure when first published in the United States. It was, however, successfully republished in 1959. Anthem (1946) is a novelette which poetically reveals the struggle and eventual success of a man in a completely collectivist society. Even the pronoun "I" has been erased from the minds of the citizens of the state in which the hero lives. The Fountainhead (1943) was the first really successful novel by Ayn Rand. It has been on bestseller lists several times. According to a letter the author of this paper received from Nathaniel Branden on June 25, 1968, The Fountainhead has sold approximately two and one half million copies. In 1949 it was made into a successful motion picture by Warner Brothers, who asked Ayn Rand to write the screenplay herself.[14] The Fountainhead is the story of Howard Roark, an architectural genius who refuses to compromise his unconventional standards. He refuses to build in any established style. Eventually, he is

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[14]Barbara Branden, "A Biographical Essay: Who Is Ayn Rand?" p. 188.

successful. The novel closes on a note of promise for his future success. Ayn Rand's last novel is Atlas Shrugged (1957). Also, according to the letter from Nathaniel Branden mentioned above, Atlas Shrugged has sold around two million copies. This novel tells the story of John Galt, a physicist who is also a philosopher. He believes that the great industrialists, scientists, and artists, that is, all the men of great creative ability, are working for their own destruction by working in a society which does not adequately reward them for their effort and ability. As a result, John Galt convinces each great man to go on strike and let the society in which these great men have lived collapse. According to Nathaniel Branden, Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead are each still selling between 100,000 and 200,000 copies a year.[15] As evidence of Ayn Rand's success as a writer, it could also be mentioned that she has had a play on Broadway. In 1934, "The Night of January 16th" (the present title) was presented as "Woman on Trial."[16] She has written several successful movie scripts such as Love Letters and You Came Along.[17] In January of 1962 The Objectivist Newsletter was started in New York City, and in 1966 the

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[15]Nathaniel Branden, "A Report to Our Readers--1965," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (December, 1965), 57.

[16]Barbara Branden, "Who Is Ayn Rand?" p. 188.

[17]Ibid., p. 211.

format of the journal was expanded under the name The Objectivist. Presently The Objectivist, which Rand co-edits with Nathaniel Branden, has around 22,000 subscribers. Ayn Rand appears monthly on university campuses throughout the country and has a weekly radio program originating from New York City. She has appeared on national television numerous times: on the Columbia Broadcasting System series "The Great Challenge" and often on the Johnny Carson and Les Crane shows. There is really no doubt as to her success as a writer and lecturer on contemporary intellectual issues.

In her introduction to her own novels and to novels by other writers, she has made brief statements of aesthetic principles. She has also written reviews of novels for The Objectivist Newsletter and The Objectivist, and she has lectured throughout the country on aesthetic principles. However, no attempt has been made to gather all this material and present Ayn Rand's aesthetic thought in any systematic form. The author of this thesis has attempted to gather Ayn Rand's remarks from many places. He believes that Ayn Rand presents a systematic approach to aesthetics and that her work presents an interesting and significant approach to aesthetic problems. The author will attempt to present in the next chapter Ayn Rand's basic aesthetic concepts. Ayn Rand discusses other art forms, but the author of this work has included in the the next chapter

only those comments about art in general that throw light on Ayn Rand's literary theory. The succeeding chapters will present Ayn Rand's views on literary schools and then of individual authors.

Ayn Rand's aesthetic views are firmly rooted in her overall philosophical framework. As has been stated, her point of view is not extremely popular among many literary figures. Likewise, her aesthetic views are not a part of the literary trends that have dominated the twentieth century up to this point. If her views must be placed chronologically, they would have to be relegated to the nineteenth century. As shall be seen, she dislikes Naturalism and admires Romanticism. What she calls Romanticism must be carefully understood, however. Her definition does not closely resemble the definition of that term found in introductory texts covering the period. The reader should be sure he understands her meaning of such terms as "art," "Romanticism," and "Naturalism"--before he reads beyond the discussions of these terms as they appear in this work. Otherwise he will find what follows that discussion to be confusing. The reader should also remember how each concept is related to Ayn Rand's total approach to philosophy in order to see it in the psychological perspective that she has recently attempted to give to her aesthetic theory.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY THEORY OF AYN RAND

In The Goal of My Writing Ayn Rand discusses the nature of art.

> Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to the artist's metaphysical values. By "metaphysical" values I mean those values which reflect an artist's fundamental view of the nature of man and the nature of reality, of the universe in which he lives and acts; or, to put it another way: an artist's fundamental view of man's relationship to existence.[1]

This definition of art is the logical place to begin a discussion of the aesthetic views of Ayn Rand. It establishes the fundamental approach that she uses over and over again in analyzing literature. The artist must select what he presents. Obviously an artist cannot present all of reality. A novel cannot present all the facts about the United States in the nineteen-twenties. The artist can only present some--indeed very few--of the facts that either did or could have existed at one time in one place. Art is then of necessity selective. Furthermore, the artist must have some basis for selecting his material. Will he write about

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[1] Ayn Rand, The Goal of My Writing (New York, 1963), p. 4.

a weakminded girl who is seduced by any person whom she meets by chance, or will he present a person able to withstand or overcome dangers? Ayn Rand believes that his choice is based upon the artist's fundamental outlook upon the world. If the writer sees the world as a place where no good can exist and where human life is incapable of rising above chance happenings, then he will present the story of a helpless girl. If, on the other hand, the artist sees the world as a place of purposeful activity for man, a place where good can survive, then he will present a heroic figure in his literary work. Notice that "can" was used, not "does." Could a man believe that the world is capable of victory yet dominated by defeat? Of course, there is such a possibility. How would such a person present reality according to Ayn Rand's definition of art? If such a writer claimed to be realistic, he would have to present both tragedy and triumph in his literary works because he claims to represent human life as it is. However, since tragedy or near tragedy is more common than victory over events, his stories would have to be predominantly tragic. But suppose, as shall be discussed more fully later, he believed in a point of view that attempted to present life as larger than it is, then he would not be obligated to present tragedy as the norm. His literary works might be predominantly optimistic as far as the possibility of human success is concerned. This might be the case even

though he were fully aware of the fact that human lives are more often tragic.

Ayn Rand as a literary aesthetician believes that failure should be presented only as a contrast to the good or ideal. She writes:

> My basic test for any story is: "Would I want to meet these characters and observe these events in real life? Is this story an experience worth living through for its own sake? Is the pleasure of contemplating these characters an end in itself?"[2]

The idea of defining the good art work in terms of its presentation of something admirable is one of Ayn Rand's fundamental attitudes. She even distinguishes the art work itself from the non-art object on these grounds. She writes that she is aware of ". . . the fact that art is selective and the fact that an art work, as distinguished from a utilitarian object, serves no practical purpose other than that of contemplation."[3] However, Ayn Rand is not concerned with the contemplation of all of life as it is, but rather with something higher than ordinary life. In The Fountainhead, the hero Howard Roark discusses this issue with Steven Mallory, a sculptor who creates idealized human forms in his sculpture. Roark has commissioned Mallory to do a piece of sculpture

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 5. Rand does make the point, however, that architecture does serve a practical end and is an art work at the same time. This point is made in her lecture on aesthetics referred to on page two of this paper.

for a building Roark has designed. About that passage Ayn Rand says, "In writing that passage, I was consciously and deliberately stating the essential goal of my own work--as a kind of small, personal manifesto . . . ."[4] The passage reads:

> I think you're the best sculptor we've got. I think it, because your figures are not what men are, but what men could be--and should be. Because you've gone beyond the probable and made us see what is possible, but possible only through you. Because your figures are more devoid of contempt for humanity than any work I've ever seen. Because you have a magnificent respect for the human being. Because your figures are the heroic in man.[5]

Many similar statements like the one above could be cited from Rand's writings to prove her belief that art should reflect or present an ideal. These quotations will be considered later in a different context. It will also be shown that they are more closely connected with her aesthetic theory than has been shown here. For now, however, the point has been made that such an idea is derived from her basic concept of art.

Ayn Rand has used over and over again one concept that is closely related to this idea. She has written in relation to art, as a selective process, that an artist's metaphysical

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[4] Ibid., p. 7.

[5] Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead (New York, 1964), p. 349.

value judgments can be clearly understood through what she calls an artist's "sense of life."

> When I speak of an artist's "universe," I mean his "sense of life," that is, his fundamental view of man and of existence. That which in philosophical terms is "metaphysics"--a comprehensive view of the nature of reality--in art, is a "sense of life," the emotional equivalent to metaphysics, the subconsciously integrated sum of a man's answers to the basic questions of existence, a sum that determines his deepest values.[6]

She has then defined a "sense of life," the criterion upon which an author makes his selection as to what type of world he will present either consciously or unconsciously, as equivalent to a metaphysical system. In other words, a writer may never have asked himself how he views the world. Yet, subconsciously he has accepted a tragic, a fatalistic, an heroic, a chaotic, an ordered, or some other kind of universe.

> Few men have a fully reasoned, consciously accepted philosophy; all men have a sense of life, and it is in terms of their sense of life that they create a work of art or respond to it. Most men--and most artists--do not attempt to identify their subconscious values; they do not attempt to translate their sense of life into philosophical terms, to subject it to the critical judgment of their mind and bring it into full harmony with their conscious convictions. If their ideas clash with their emotions, they leave the conflict unresolved. That conflict has tragic consequences, particularly for artists. But whatever its psychological state may be, whether his sense of life be a radiant treasure house or a hidden sewer, it is his sense of life that determines the essentials of an artist's work.[7]

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[6] Ayn Rand, "Introduction," Ninety-Three by Victor Hugo, translated by Lowell Bair (New York, 1962), p. vii.

[7] Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

Because Ayn Rand believes an artist always presents his sense of life in his art, she believes that an artist portrays a total view of the value of existence rather than simply what is. Even if an artist were to present a totally realistic world, Ayn Rand would say that the artist has made a value judgment in favor of that particular type of world. Furthermore, she would be willing to say that the reader can judge the artist on the basis of what he does present, even if he may claim to present merely what is real. If an artist considers life admirable, then he will present the ideal, because only that would represent his estimate of the essential meaning of life. However, if an artist does not consider life admirable, then he will present the unheroic, because he believes the ideal impossible to achieve in real life. How then does a writer make a selection from the mass of facts around him which he could present? He selects on the basis of what he wants to present, and this selection is a reflection of his own sense of life. So far, all of these statements on art are derived logically from the nature of what art is. Art, as Ayn Rand has more recently restated her definition, is ". . . a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value judgments."[8]

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[8]Ayn Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," The Objectivist, V (March, 1966), 1.

She writes:

> If one saw, in real life, a beautiful woman wearing an exquisite evening gown, with a cold sore on her lips, the blemish would mean nothing but a minor affliction, and one would ignore it.
>
> But a painting of such a woman would be a corrupt, obscenely vicious attack on man, on beauty, on all values--and one would experience a feeling of immense disgust and indignation at the artist.[9]

Art is a selective re-creation of reality. Art ". . . isolates and integrates those aspects of reality which present man's fundamental view of himself and of his relationship to existence."[10] Art ". . . converts man's metaphysical abstractions into the equivalent of concretes, into specific entities open to man's direct perception."[11]

> Art brings man's concepts to the perceptual level of his consciousness and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts.[12]

This means that an art object expresses the values of the artist and becomes an expression of a sense of values. If a painting presents a beautiful, elegant woman, then the artist sees the world as capable of having beauty and elegance. On the other hand, if the painting is flawed, then the artist believes that the best man can achieve is the near perfect. He believes that some ugliness is bound to remain.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

This aesthetic point of view makes every work of art an expression of a universalized comment on the value of life. The quotation above also makes the point that the art object is comprehended perceptually, that is, through the senses. A man cannot hold in his head at a single moment all the abstractions about life he believes. An art object gives him the chance to experience his total view of the world directly and instantaneously. An art object then is a physical embodiment of an intellectual point of view.

Does this view that a flawed art object represents an "obscenely vicious attack on man" mean that the death of the heroine in We the Living at the end of the novel is to be interpreted to mean that tragedy is an essential part of life? Ayn Rand would not want to say such a thing, but such a conclusion does seem logically to follow the argument she has presented. In Dallas two years ago Nathaniel Branden attempted to answer this question. He said that We the Living was a novel dramatizing what happens to the best people in a totalitarian dictatorship. Kira's death is a direct narrative embodiment of the idea that a person's fate is not determined by his own effort in such a situation, but is controlled by the government in power. He further argued that the novel presents a situation that is not intended to be a norm for man. This statement of the purpose of the novel seems accurate, but, from Ayn Rand's point of view as an aesthetic

theorist, is the presentation of such a theme as the power of a totalitarian state over individuals a theme that is justified by her aesthetic doctrines? If, as has been quoted, the ignoble can be presented in an art work only as a contrast to the ideal, then must the ideal be presented in We the Living? Since the ideal is not presented in any form but by implication, have Ayn Rand's aesthetic statements condemned one of her novels? She would condemn a cold sore, but not the death of her own heroine? Surely the blemish idea would not lead to the conclusion that art must portray only the ideal. Her own novels have villains, and sometimes men lose.

Ayn Rand could make several replies to this criticism. First, We the Living was written before she formulated her aesthetic theory. Also, she claims that her intention is to present man as heroic, but this does not mean that the world he lives in must also be an ideal world. As a philosophical naturalist she would admit to the occurrence of chance happenings. Nevertheless, the world she presents is one in which men are predominantly in control of their own destiny. Her statement about the artist's value judgments implies that the artist's concept of man and nature should be the ideal. Referring to the rejection of a work of art because of some flaw, she writes:

> This does not mean that a sense of life is a valid criterion of esthetic merit, either for the

> artist or the viewer. A sense of life is not infallible. But a sense of life is the source of art, the psychological mechanism which enables man to create a realm such as art.[13]

This means that there are other considerations that must be relied upon when judging a literary work. These will be discussed later, but here it must be said that what art _is_ and how this fact is related to what it _should be_ is the central point upon which Ayn Rand establishes her whole approach to aesthetics. She has said that her goal is to portray an ideal man, and it is hard to see how the ideal can be defeated in any plot from her own point of view. Yet Kira is defeated. Rand has written:

> This is the motive and purpose of my writing: _the projection of an ideal man_. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal, as an end in itself--to which my didactic, intellectual or philosophical values contained in a novel are only the means.[14]

Kira is a moral ideal to the extent that Ayn Rand had been able to define an ideal when she wrote _We the Living_ in the thirties, but regardless of the theme as Branden states it, Kira's death seems out of keeping with the general direction of Ayn Rand's stated literary goal.

It is outside the scope of this chapter to present an analysis of any of Ayn Rand's novels, but the issue of the

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[13] _Ibid._

[14] Rand, _The Goal of My Writing_, p. 3.

conclusion of We the Living becomes important in a discussion of the credibility of Ayn Rand's aesthetic point of view. Does she live by her own rules, in other words? As she says in the introduction to the 1959 edition of We the Living, she knew little more about the moral ideal at the time she wrote We the Living than do the characters in the novel.[15] The important issue from Ayn Rand's point of view is: what sense of life does the novel present? Even though the heroine dies in the end, the novel is not pessimistic about life. It ends on an intensely dramatic note that is joyous even under such tragic circumstances.

> She [Kira] smiled. She knew she was dying. But it did not matter any longer. She had known something which no human words could ever tell and she knew it now. She had been awaiting it and she felt it, as if it had been, as if she had lived it. Life had been, if only because she had known it could be, and she felt it now as a hymn without sound, deep under the little hole that dripped red drops into the snow, deeper than that from which the red drops came. A moment or an eternity--did it matter? Life, undefeated, existed and could exist.
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> She smiled, her last smile, to so much that had been possible.[16]

As far as tone is concerned, We the Living is within the scope of the aesthetic doctrine of Ayn Rand. The same general approach is found in We the Living even if there is not the same explicitness characteristic of her later

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[15]Ayn Rand, "Forward," in We the Living (New York, 1959), p. v.

[16]Ayn Rand, We the Living (New York, 1959), p. 446.

novels. Even though Kira dies, she does remain "undefeated." She has kept her joyous sense of life throughout the novel. That fact makes her death, if not the ideal outcome of such a situation, at least an acceptable conclusion. And, it does dramatically illustrate the theme of We the Living as Branden states it.

Because Ayn Rand believes that the proper goal of an artist is to present an ideal, she is concerned with philosophy. Before an ideal can be presented, three questions about man and the world must be answered: (1) Is the world intelligible? (2) Can man control reality?, and (3) Can man find happiness?[17] How an artist consciously answers these questions or what he feels about them unconsciously determines the view of life he will select and present. Ayn Rand says that philosophical ethics is the foundation upon which aesthetics must be built.[18] She writes:

> Since my purpose is the presentation of an ideal man, I had to define and present the conditions which make him possible and which his existence requires. Since man's character is the product of his premises, I had to define and present the kind of premises and values that create the character of an ideal man and motivate his actions, which means that I had to define and present a rational code of ethics. Since man acts among and deals with other men, I had to present the kind of social

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[17] Speech on aesthetics by Ayn Rand, Tape transcription of lecture #17 of NBI's course on "Basic Principles of Objectivism," no date given.

[18] Rand, The Goal of My Writing, p. 4.

> system that makes it possible for ideal man to exist and function. . . .
>
> But neither politics nor ethics nor philsophy are ends in themselves, neither in life nor in literature. Only Man is an end in himself.[19]

Ayn Rand has become a philosopher. She now spends more of her time writing articles on political theory and epistemology than on any literary task (or at least most of her published works in the last few years, that is, since 1957, have been philosophical arguments rather than literary projects). Nevertheless, she began as a writer attempting to define a moral ideal. She has often been criticized for being too philosophical in her novels. Her critics never seem, however, to attack the premise upon which she bases her philosophical orientation, that is, that art is of necessity selective. Whether a person agrees with it or not, her philosophical orientation is related to her total approach to aesthetics. And, furthermore, if a person wished to attack her aesthetic system, that would be the place where it would have to be done. Of course, a critic can judge a work on purely aesthetic grounds. Ayn Rand is not opposed to such criticism, as will be shown at the end of this chapter. However, because Ayn Rand's approach to literature is usually from a moral point of view, any person who wished to attack her system would find this the logical

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[19]Ibid.

place to begin. In art Rand stresses the point that the purpose of art is not philosophical wisdom. "Art does not teach--it shows, it displays the full concretized reality as the final goal."[20] She writes:

> The primary purpose of an airplane is, not to teach man how to fly, but to give him the actual experience of flying. So is the primary purpose of an art work.[21]

Ayn Rand believes that man needs art. She believes that it helps men to keep their goals and their moral purposes and their "sense of life" from deteriorating. Yet, she does not just tack this idea on; she integrates it into her whole theory. She introduced this idea within the context of a discussion of the idea of is and ought in literature.

> Just as man's physical survival depends on his own effort, so does his psychological survival. Man faces two corollaries, interdependent fields of action in which a constant exercise of choice and a constant creative process are demanded of him: the world around him and his own soul. . . . Just as he has to produce the material values he needs to sustain his life, so he has to acquire the values of character that enable him to sustain it and that make his life worth living. He is born without the knowledge of either.[22]

After ethics has told man what the proper code of value is, art presents that code in a concrete form. Art makes it

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[20] Ibid., p. 8.

[21] Ibid., p. 9.

[22] Ibid., p. 8.

possible for men to experience a metaphysical perspective directly through the senses as a total experience. Rand refers to Babbit, Sinclair Lewis' character, as an illustration of the ability of a character in literature to embody a concrete representation of a total point of view.

> He /Babbit/ is the concretization of an observation that covers an incalculable sum of observations and evaluations of an incalculable number of characteristics possessed by an incalculable number of men of a certain type. Lewis has isolated their essential traits and has integrated them into the concrete form of a single character--and when you say of someone: "He's a Babbit," your appraisal includes, in a single judgment, the enormous total conveyed by that figure.[23]

Already her belief that literature is an expression of values has been presented. Also, literature, according to this point of view, is not didactic; it embodies or represents a principle in concrete form. She puts the need for art this way:

> Although the representation of things "as they might be and ought to be" helps man to achieve those things in real life /an understanding of man and existence/, this is only a secondary value. The primary value is that it gives him the experience of living in a world where things are as they ought to be. This experience is of crucial importance to him: it is his psychological life-line.[24]

Man needs art, or at least, psychologically healthy men need art that projects an ideal. She often refers to the

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[23]Ayn Rand, "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (April, 1965), 16.

[24]Rand, The Goal of My Writing, p. 9.

emotional results of such an aesthetic experience of art as refueling. Man needs psychological refueling as well as physical. Art can give him that. But it is the view of life behind the real story that gives him that encouragement. For the youngster it is not Buck Rogers that is needed, but the life of adventure and excitement that keeps his interest in life from being destroyed. Buck Rogers is only the character that represents that kind of life for him. According to Ayn Rand, it is not Howard Roark that the adult needs. But the adult does need constantly to be aware that heroes like Howard Roark can and should exist. Howard Roark is a concrete representation of an ideal. This is what Ayn Rand thinks great literature ought to be.

A person identifies himself with a character or type of action. Ayn Rand has defined what she thinks of this process. She writes:

> "To identify with" is a colloquial designation for a process of abstraction: it means to observe a common element between the character and oneself, to draw an abstraction from the character's problems and apply it to one's own life. Subconsciously, without any knowledge of esthetic theory, but by virtue of art, this is the way in which most people react to fiction and to all other forms of art.[25]

In other words, ". . . a fiction story is an abstraction that claims universality, i.e., application to every human

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[25]Ayn Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," The Objectivist, V (March, 1966), 3.

life."[26] This means that through a process of identification, the reader may identify with a purposeful character like Howard Roark, and, as a result, be convinced that that is the only way to act if he wants to achieve his goals in life. At this point one must remember Ayn Rand's statement that her aesthetic view is not primarily didactic. The reader can learn from a work of literature, but the presentation of an ideal is still the primary purpose of the work of art.

> The importance of that experience [the experience of an ideal] is not in what man learns from it, but in that he experiences it. The fuel is not a theoretical principle, not a didactic "message," but the life-giving fact of experiencing a moment of metaphysical joy--a moment of love for existence.[27]

The response to values, however, works two different ways for two different types of people. In her philosophical writings Ayn Rand has differentiated rational and irrational men. It is outside the scope of this paper to develop that distinction, but it becomes very important in her analysis of the aesthetic experience at this point. The rational man is a man with the characteristics of one of her fictional heroes like Howard Roark in The Fountainhead or John Galt in Atlas Shrugged. Such a person is purposeful, competent, ambitious, free of unearned guilt. He would experience art

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[26] Ibid., p. 4.

[27] Rand, The Goal of My Writing, p. 9.

as described above. He would seek "a moment of love for existence." But Rand also talks about the irrational man. He is the man who does not use his mind for the achievement of positive goals. He seeks acceptance from others. He is weak and avoids self-assertion. This type of person would seek something else from art. Note that according to Ayn Rand it is still an expression of his own value judgments.

> For an irrational man, the concretized projection of his malevolent sense of life serves, not as fuel and inspiration to move forward, but as permission to stand still: it declares that values are unattainable, that the struggle is futile, that fear, guilt, pain, and failure are mankind's predestined end--and that he couldn't help it. Or, on a lower level of irrationality, the concretized projection of a malignant sense of life provides a man with an image of triumphant malice, of hatred for existence, of vengeance against life's best exponents, of the defeat and destruction of all human values; his kind of art gives him a moment's illusion that he is right--that evil is metaphysically potent.[28]

Even though these two responses are opposite in their motivation, they both reflect the viewer's or reader's metaphysical value judgments, and the response of the individual is in terms of his own sense of life. In other words, the primary quality that is communicated is a sense of life, either a positive, heroic, rational sense of life or a negative, guilt-ridden, status-seeking, irrational sense of life.

A sense of life is then one of the primary concerns of art, but there are complications. In the lecture on

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[28] Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," pp. 4-5.

aesthetics from the "Basic Principles" course, Ayn Rand says that the sense of life found in a work may not always be totally consistent with a writer's consciously held philosophical views. From her own philosophical point of view she believes that the sense of life found in the novels of Sinclair Lewis is less admirable than their philosophical "message." On the other hand, she believes that the sense of life in the novels of Victor Hugo is superior to his consciously held philosophical ideas. This discrepancy is caused by what she terms a lack of integration. A writer may hold certain views, yet act as if other views were true. Likewise, in his choice of material he may make a choice based upon a different set of values than the one he consciously tries to "make fit" the story he has created.

When a story is to be judged, one of the first considerations then, as Ayn Rand argues, is a judgment of its sense of life. She believes that most people are impressed with the value of life when young, but gradually they lose this affirmative sense of life.

> When people look back at their childhood or youth, their wistfulness comes from the memory, not of what their lives had been in those years, but of what life had then promised to be. The expectation of some undefinable splendor, of the unusual, the exciting, the great is an attribute of youth--and the process of aging is the process of that expectation's gradual extinction.

> One does not have to let it happen. But that fire dies for lack of fuel, under the gray weight of disappointments . . . .[29]

Ayn Rand believes that art can prevent this lowering of standards as a person grows older and realizes that the world is less than the best of all possible worlds. As has already been shown, she believes that art can hold up to man a standard of good and a way of looking at life. Can literature not help the child to hold on to his interest in life? She answers in the affirmative. Yet, she is quick to point out that literature is not didactic. It rather gives the child the experience of living in a certain kind of world.

> The major source and demonstration of moral values available to a child is Romantic art (particularly Romantic literature). What Romantic art offers him is not moral rules, not an explicit didactic message, but the image of a moral person--i. e., the concretized abstraction of a moral ideal. It offers a concrete, directly perceivable answer to the very abstract question which a child senses, cannot yet conceptualize: What kind of person is moral and what kind of life does he lead?[30]

Later there will be a discussion of why Ayn Rand thinks Romantic art is the only type of art capable of solving this problem, but before that issue is discussed, an understanding of what kind of creature she believes man to be, as far as

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[29]Ayn Rand, Review of Ninety-Three by Victor Hugo, The Objectivist Newsletter, I (October, 1962), 42.

[30]Ayn Rand, "Art and Moral Treason," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (March, 1965), 10.

his mental operations are concerned, is absolutely necessary. She believes that a child develops mentally in two ways. He develops two kinds of concepts, that is, two kinds of abstractions. He develops cognitive concepts and normative concepts. "The first deals with knowledge of the facts of reality--the second with the evaluation of these facts. The first forms the epistemological foundation of science--the second, of morality and of art."[31] Rand believes that a child is not hindered from the development of cognitive ideas to a totally damaging degree in our society, but she does believe that the development of normative standards is consistently hindered.

> Where, then, can a child learn the concept of moral values and of a moral character in whose image he will shape his own soul? Where can he find the evidence, the material from which to develop a chain of normative abstractions? He is not likely to find a clue in the chaotic, bewildering, contradictory evidence offered by the adults in his day-by-day experience.[32]

She believes that the normal child is incapable of conceptualizing all of the concepts necessary to develop a morality and sense of life of his own. As a result, he is hopelessly lost. It is here that art becomes important not only, as has been already shown, for the adult's continual development, but also for the crucial development of a child's sense of life. From art a child learns

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

> . . . the emotional experience of admiration for man's highest potential, the experience of looking up to a hero--a view of life motivated and dominated by values, a life in which man's choices are practicable, effective and crucially important--that is, a moral sense of life.[33]

If the development of a child's character is assisted by art, then he may develop harmoniously. His ability to hold moral ideals may change. Rand says that at the age of seven the child may be impressed by a cowboy.[34] Later the ideal may be a detective. As he approaches maturity, his ideal may be a philosopher, but he always holds an ideal in relation to his ability to conceptualize, that is according to his ability to make abstractions. The adult then "abstracts out" of someone like Howard Roark a set of moral values. This idea is important if an attempt is made to understand the vigor with which Ayn Rand attacks literary schools that do not hold up an ideal for man. Because of her beliefs, this attack becomes a moral attack rather than simply a dispute over a philosophical issue.

Obviously, Ayn Rand would have to believe that certain mental problems can be traced back to a break in the normative development of a child, if she believes normative development crucial to a person's psychological maturity. This is in fact her position. She puts it this way:

> If he /any man/ finds himself fearing, evading, and negating the highest experience possible to man,

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[33] Ibid., p. 12.

[34] Ibid.

> a state of unclouded exaltation, he can know that he is in profound trouble and that his only alternatives are: either to check his value-premises from scratch, from the start, from the repressed, forgotten, betrayed figure of his particular Buck Rogers, and painfully to reconstruct his broken chain of normative abstractions--or to become completely the kind of monster he is in those moments when, with an obsequious giggle, he tells some fat Babbit that exaltation is impractical.[35]

Ayn Rand attacks many of the dominant cultural trends today because she believes that these viewpoints do not recognize the meaning and significance of art. In an article entitled "Our Cultural Value-Deprivation" she discusses some of the reasons why art has been misunderstood and misused.[36] In this article, she attacks the present state of philosophy on the grounds that it has given up the search for values that are a pre-condition for the development of art. It is on these moral grounds that she has derived her attacks on many of the aspects of modern and even traditionally western institutions. She believes the value of art has not been recognized because it is such a personal experience. She writes that the fact that art is so personal has contributed to an inability of previous thinkers to understand the meaning of art.

> The reason why art has such a profoundly personal significance for men is that art confirms or denies

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[35] Ibid., p. 14.

[36] Ayn Rand, "Our Cultural Value-Deprivation," The Objectivist, V (April and May, 1966), 1-8, 10-13.

> the efficacy of a man's consciousness, according to whether an art work supports or negates his fundamental view of reality.[37]

On the whole she has few kind things to say about the intellectuals who have contributed to aesthetic theory. She blames religion for the aura of "mysticism" that she believes surrounds art and the creative process even today. The only important work she recognizes in the history of aesthetic thought is Aristotle's Poetics. In her lecture on aesthetics she states that the sad state of art development is proven by the fact that Aristotle's statement that art should present what might be and ought to be was not fully realized until the development of the novel twenty-three centuries later. Because of her profound disagreement with so much of western thought, she does not recognize any literary theory as having influenced her. In the letter from Nathaniel Branden that was mentioned earlier, he writes, "Miss Rand is entirely the originator of her own esthetic views." Rand states that the novel is the most important genre of literature because it has the ability to embody an ideal to a greater degree than any other art form. The novel is then an important literary form because of the many ways in which it reveals a sense of life.

In her lecture on aesthetics, Rand distinguishes the various art forms. She says that each art form is

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[37] Rand, "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," p. 18.

distinguished by the medium it uses. The art forms are such things as literature, painting, sculpture, and music. The medium of music, for example, is periodic vibrations of sound. The medium of painting is canvas and paint. She says that every art form is defined by the medium it uses, so that it is impossible for an art form to exist in any medium besides its appropriate defining medium. She says that art is not anything made by an artist. Art is something made by an artist in the medium of an art, the particular medium in which the art object reveals itself. She then says that there is no such thing as non-objective art. A non-fiction novel is then by definition not a work of literature. By definition the novel is fictional, and it must be objective. She says that any work of art should be potentially understandable to a rational man. A novel, for example, although fictional must tell an objectively understandable story. A series of unintelligible words could not then be called a novel.

The novel is an art form whose medium is language. It has four basic elements: theme, plot, characterization, and style.

The theme of a novel is primarily concerned with its subject.

> It is the selectivity in regard to subject--the most severely, rigorously, ruthlessly exercised selectivity--that I hold as the primary, the essential, the cardinal aspect of art. In literature, this means: the story--which means: the

> plot and characters--which means: the kind of men and events that a writer chooses to portray.[38]

Because Ayn Rand believes in the portrayal of the ideal, she is willing to go even further than the above statement would indicate. She demands a great deal of the novelist. As a result, when she discusses novelists, there are only a few she speaks of with admiration and very few with any praise. She says:

> I see the novelist as a combination of prospector and jeweler. The novelist must discover the potential, the gold mine, of man's soul, must extract the gold and then fashion as magnificent a crown as his ability and vision permit.
>
> Just as men of ambition for material values do not rummage through city dumps, but venture out into the lonely mountains in search of gold--so men of ambition for intellectual values do not sit in their backyards, but venture out in quest of the noblest, the purest, the costliest elements. I would not enjoy the spectacle of Benvenuto Cellini making mud-pies.[39]

Therefore, the proper theme of a novel should be the expression of some positive value. The theme of a good novel is not the expression of anything evil or disgusting.

> That which is not worth contemplating in life, is not worth re-creating in art.
>
> Misery, disease, disaster, evil, all the negatives of human existence are proper subjects of <u>study</u> in life, for the purpose of understanding and correcting them--but are not proper subjects of <u>contemplation</u> for contemplation's sake. In art, and in literature, these negatives are worth re-creating only in relation to some positive, as a foil, as a contrast, as a means of stressing the positive--but <u>not</u> as an end in themselves.[40]

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[38] Rand, <u>The Goal of My Writing</u>, p. 6.

[39] <u>Ibid.</u>

[40] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 7.

Rand finds that not all authors are consistent in their choice of subject matter. They reveal variety and various degrees of worth from her point of view. She writes:

> The choice of subject declares what aspects of existence the artist regards as important--as worthy of being re-created and contemplated. He may choose to present heroic figures, as exponents of man's nature--or he may choose statistical composites of the average, the undistinguished, the mediocre--or he may choose crawling specimens of depravity. He may present the triumph of heroes, in fact or in spirit (Victor Hugo), or their struggle (Michelangelo), or their defeat (Shakespeare). He may present the folks next door: next door to palaces (Tolstoy), or to drugstores (Sinclair Lewis), or to kitchens (Vermeer), or to sewers (Zola). He may present monsters as objects of moral denunciation (Dostoevsky), or as objects of terror (Goya)--or he may demand sympathy for his monsters, and thus crawl outside the limits of the realm of values, including esthetic ones.[41]

Ayn Rand makes a distinction between two different kinds of themes as far as a novel is concerned. She uses these terms distinctly as tools of analysis in discussing the merits of works of fiction. She distinguishes between the "plot-theme" and the "theme." She refers to the "plot-theme" as:

> . . . the central situation that expresses and dramatizes a novel's abstract theme. Thus, the plot-theme of We the Living is: the struggle of three young and talented people to achieve life and happiness in Soviet Russia, and the manner in which the system destroys all three of them, not in spite of, but because of, their virtues. In Anthem, it is: the struggle of a young scientist to discover the concept of "ego," in a totally collectivized society of the future, from which

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[41] Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," pp. 5-6.

> the word "I" has vanished. In The Fountainhead, it is: the battle of a great innovator--an architect of genius--against a society geared and committed to mediocrity.[42] In Atlas Shrugged, it is: the mind on strike.

The plot-theme is the subject of a novel; the "theme" of a novel is a universalized statement of the content and meaning of the novel's story. Compare, for example, the statement of "plot-theme" above with Ayn Rand's statement about the theme of one of her novels and the distinction is made clear. In the 1959 "Foreword" to We the Living, she says, "Its [the novel's] basic theme is the sanctity of human life . . . in the sense of 'supreme value.'"[43] In her lecture on aesthetics more recently, Ayn Rand made the same point. She called the theme of a novel a "summation of a novel's abstract meaning." It may be either a philosophical or a particular generalization depending upon the novel in question. Ayn Rand believes that the form of the novel is dictated by the theme and that the two must complement each other. The theme is dramatized by the actions in the novel.

In her lecture on aesthetics she discusses the other elements of a novel also. She says that "a story in which nothing happens is not a story." Also, a chronicle of

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[42] Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," in Who Is Ayn Rand? (New York, 1962), p. 107.

[43] Rand, "Foreword," We the Living, p. v.

events is only partly literary. She believes that the writer who does not carefully select the events of his novel defaults on the most important task of a novelist. This selectivity applies to all the elements of a novel, but Ayn Rand emphasizes the importance of selectivity in relation to her plot. She has stated that a mechanical reproduction of detail is not literature. She reserves the term literary, it seems, for the more creative types of writing, and one of the most important aspects of anything "literary" then becomes the plot. Nathaniel Branden writes:

> Once, after having delivered an address to members of the publishing profession, Ayn Rand was asked: "What are the three most important elements in a novel?" She answered: "Plot-plot-and plot." The most beautifully written novel that lacks a plot, she has remarked, is like a superbly outfitted automobile that lacks a motor.[44]

Branden writes that the process for organizing a plot goes something like this:

> The logical progression is: choice--therefore, values--therefore, the necessity of action to achieve them--therefore, the possibility of conflict--therefore, plot. Action and effort are necessities of survival, of the achievement of any values; they are inherent in the nature of human life. Conflict results from the fact that (a) a man's values may clash with one another, and (b) a man's values may clash with the values and purposes of others; both (a) and (b) are possible since men are neither infallible nor omniscient. Either a man achieves his values and goals or he is defeated; in a novel, the

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[44] Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," pp. 105-106.

> manner in which this issue is resolved constitutes the climax. Thus, plot is not . . . an "artificial contrivance" that belies the actual facts of reality and the nature of human life. Plot is the abstraction of man's relation to existence.[45]

A plot then, according to this point of view, does become the most important part of any work of fiction. Ayn Rand has defined plot in more explicit terms than has Nathaniel Branden above. She has shown how it is then related to the novel.

> "A plot," writes Ayn Rand, "is a purposeful progression of events. A plot-structure is a series of integrated, logically connected events, moved by a central purpose, leading to the resolution of a climax. A plot-structure is the dramatization of man's free will; it is the physical form of his spiritual sovereignty--of his power to deal with existence."[46]

This definition needs to be broadened to include conflicts with nature perhaps, but Objectivism's basic concept of selectivity is expressed here. The theme and the plot must be integrated, and the plot must express only the essentials to convey the theme.

Branden says:

> To write and to characterize by means of essentials requires that one know what is essential and what is derivative, what is a cause and what is a consequence.[47]

In Who Is Ayn Rand? Branden reports that once a young man asked why John Galt never had any trivial accidents in

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[45] Ibid., p. 106.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., p. 101.

Atlas Shrugged of the kind that happen to people every day. Ayn Rand's reply was that they would serve no purpose in the novel; they would not further the plot and thus dramatize the theme or any aspect of it in any way. She stated that, "In life, one ignores the unimportant; in art, one omits it."[48] It is upon this basis that Ayn Rand criticizes such novels as The American Tragedy, by Theodore Dreiser and The Magic Mountain, by Thomas Mann. The stated theme of the novel is not dramatized by the actions that occur in the novel.

Ayn Rand states in her lecture on aesthetics that a good plot must not only be logically constructed, but it must logically resolve itself. Otherwise the believability and the significance the theme of the novel might have is undercut. A good novelist must use this all important power of selectivity to be sure that he does not destroy his novel by the inappropriate joining of purpose and form. The plot structure must also be integrated so that all the events serve only one central theme, and the plot-theme must be consistently presented throughout. Otherwise, the novel loses its effectiveness. It throws doubt on the accuracy of the very theme it is pledged to uphold.

Another of the important elements of a novel, according to Ayn Rand, is style. She believes that the style of a

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[48] Ibid., p. 103.

work reveals the author's epistemological concepts just as the subject reveals the author's metaphysical concepts. Ayn Rand believes that the rational man will seek certain stylistic characteristics just as he will seek certain metaphysical concepts. The rational man will seek clarity, concreteness, and "clear-cut identity" in art, just as these will be the qualities of style expressed by the author who is rational. The irrational author will portray an "out-of-focus" world where things are unknowable or at best can only be guessed at. Likewise, these are the qualities that the irrational man will look for in art as an expression of his basic belief that the clear-cut does not have to be.

It is the theme of an art work, as she has restated many times, that unites the subject and style within one purpose. She writes:

> The theme of an art work is the link uniting its subject and its style. "Style" is a particular, distinctive, or characteristic mode of execution. An artist's style is the product of his own psycho-epistemology--and, by implication, a projection of his view of man's consciousness, of its efficacy or impotence, of its proper method or level of functioning.[49]

As related to epistemology Ayn Rand is even more explicit when she says that the style of an artist reveals ". . . that level of mental functioning on which the artist feels most at home."[50] She adds:

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[49] Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," p. 6.

[50] Ibid., p. 7.

> This is the reason why style is crucially important in art--both to the artist and to the reader or viewer--and why its importance is experienced as a profoundly personal matter. To the artist, it is an expression, to the reader or viewer a confirmation, of his own consciousness--which means his efficacy--which means: of his self-esteem. . . .[51]

Ayn Rand's belief that an artist could express one sense of life while explicitly believing in another was discussed earlier. This same concept can be applied to a writer's style. A writer may express one sense of life in his style and another in his choice of subject. Ayn Rand gives several examples of this phenomenon from painting. She mentions Salvador Dali ". . . whose style projects the luminous clarity of a rational psycho-epistemology, while most . . . of his subjects project an irrational and revoltingly evil metaphysics."[52] She cites Cubism as an extreme form of the irrational because the idea of Cubism ". . . seeks specifically to disintegrate man's consciousness by painting objects as man does not perceive them (from several perspectives at once)."[53]

In literature as in painting Ayn Rand observes the same lack of consistency. She gives examples of various degrees of difference.

> A writer's style may project a blend of reason and passionate emotion (Victor Hugo)--or a chaos of floating abstractions, of emotions cut off from

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., p. 6.

[53] Ibid.

> reality (Thomas Wolfe)--or the dry, bare, concrete-bound, humor-tinged raucousness of an intellectual reporter (Sinclair Lewis)--or the disciplined, perceptive, lucid, yet muted understatement of a represser (John O'Hara)--or the carefully superficial, over-detailed precision of an amoralist (Flaubert)--or the mannered artificiality of a social metaphysician (several moderns not worthy of mention).[54]

In her lecture on aesthetics Ayn Rand reads two quotations to the audience. She asks the audience to make a judgment as to the worth of each description. She does not tell the audience the names of the two writers so that they will not be prejudiced because of the popular reputation of the authors involved. The descriptions are both of New York City at night. One of the descriptions is from Mickey Spillane's <u>One Lonely Night</u>. The description occurs at the very beginning of that novel and sets the mood for the first chapter.

> Nobody ever walked across the bridge, not on a night like this. The rain was misty enough to be almost fog-like, a cold gray curtain that separated me from the pale ovals of white that were faces locked behind the steamed-up windows of the cars that hissed by. Even the brillance that was Manhattan by night was reduced to a few sleepy, yellow lights off in the distance.
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> Some place over there I had left my car and started walking, burying my head in the collar of my raincoat, with the night pulled in around me like a blanket. I walked and I smoked and I flipped the spent butts ahead of me and watched them arch to the pavement and fizzle out with one last wink. If there was life behind the windows

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[54] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 6-7. A "social metaphysician" is one who replaces the question what is real? with the question what do others think is real? That is, he is a person who is more concerned with agreement with other people than with the truth of an issue.

> of the buildings on either side of me, I didn't notice it. The street was mine, all mine. They gave it to me gladly and wondered why I wanted it so nice and all alone.[55]

The second description she reads is from The Web and the Rock by Thomas Wolfe.

> That hour, that moment, and that place struck with a peerless coincision upon the very heart of his own youth, the crest and zenith of his own desire. The city had never seemed as beautiful as it looked that night. For the first time he saw that New York was supremely, among the cities of the world, the city of the night. There had been achieved here a loveliness that was astounding and incomparable, a kind of modern beauty, inherent to its place and time, that no other place nor time could match. He realized suddenly that the beauty of other cities of the night--of Paris spread below one from the butte of Sacre Coeur, in its vast, mysterious geography of lights, fumed here and there by drowsy, sensual, and mysterious blossoms of nocturnal radience; of London with its smoky nimbus of fogged light, which was so peculiarly thrilling because it was so vast, so lost in the illimitable--had each its special quality, so lovely and mysterious, but had yet produced no beauty that could equal this.[56]

Rand states that she regards the first description as the best. She says that Spillane provides vivid details that allow the reader to become involved in and respond to the situation. She says that Spillane provides only enough details to set the mood and then goes on with the action.

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[55]Mickey Spillane, One Lonely Night (New York, 1964), p. 5.

[56]Thomas Wolfe, The Web and the Rock (New York, 1939), pp. 472-473.

Wolfe, on the other hand, gives the reader vague abstractions that express little that is definite: beauty, mystery, loveliness. Wolfe demands that the reader accept the protagonist's judgment about what the city is rather than give him the facts to judge for himself. He asks the reader to accept vague generalizations. In such a way, Ayn Rand believes both authors reveal something about themselves. Spillane shows that he is concerned with the factual. Wolfe reveals his concern with the vaguely abstract. Clarity--its presence or absence--is then for Ayn Rand one way in which a sense of life is conveyed through style in fiction.

The fourth major element in a novel is the element of characterization. For Ayn Rand this means the novel's portrayal of traits making up the persons in the novel. Her primary concern is that the writer present the essential characteristics. He must present those characteristics that tell the reader what kind of a person the character is. The evidence given must be consistent, and the description (if any) of the character must be consistent with the actions of that character. Otherwise the character becomes unbelievable. The characterization must do two things at once. It must present the universality of a character, and it must make him believable as a real person by portraying the particular and the specific. She believes that long descriptions are largely meaningless and take away from the novel's effectiveness. She paraphrases the adage that one

picture is worth a thousand words by saying that ". . . one action is worth a thousand adjectives." As an example of excellent characterization from her point of view, she cites Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment which reveals the character of the protagonist "down to his very soul."

After she has divided the novel into these four separate elements (theme, plot, style, and characterization), she points out that such a distinction is made only for the purpose of analysis. The good novel, she concludes, is an indivisible entity. All of its parts work together. Style is the one by which the other three are conveyed, but all must be appropriate or the novel will not be a whole artistic creation.

Although Ayn Rand spends a great deal of energy analyzing the relationship between a philosophical attitude and the ways that attitude is expressed in a literary work, she does not believe that an aesthetic judgment of a work of art should be based on the philosophical ideas embodied in it. She writes:

> The truth or falsehood of a given artist's philosophy as such, is not an esthetic matter; it may affect a given viewer's enjoyment of his work, but it does not negate its esthetic merit. Some sort of philosophical meaning, however, some implicit view of life, is a necessary element of a work of art. The absence of any metaphysical values whatever, i. e., a gray, uncommitted, passively, indeterminate sense of life, results in a soul without fuel, motor, or voice and renders a man impotent in the field of art.[57]

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[57] Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," p. 5.

Although a sense of life is important in judging the merits of an art work from other points of view, from a strictly aesthetic point of view the sense of life found in an art work must be kept out of any judgment.

> A sense of life is the source of art, but it is not the sole qualification of an artist or of an esthetician, and it is not a criterion of esthetic judgment . . . . Esthetics is a branch of philosophy--and just as a philosopher does not approach any other branch of his science with his feelings or emotions as his criterion of judgment, so he cannot do it in the field of esthetics. A sense of life is not sufficient professional equipment. . . .
>
> The fact that one agrees or disagrees with an artist's philosophy is irrelevant to an esthetic appraisal of his work qua art. One does not have to agree with an artist (nor even to enjoy him) in order to evaluate his work. In essence, an objective evaluation requires that one identify the artist's theme, the abstract meaning of his work (exclusively by identifying the evidence contained in the work and allowing no other outside considerations), then evaluate the purely esthetic elements of the work, the technical mastery (or lack of it) with which he projects (or fails to project) his view of life.[58]

Ayn Rand believes that there is no contradiction to be found in a statement like "This is a great work of art, but I don't like it."[59] She is quick to clarify her statement. This is true, ". . . provided one defines the exact meaning of that statement . . . ."[60] She then says that the first part of such a statement refers to a "purely esthetic appraisal."[61] The second part of such a statement

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[58] Ibid., p. 7.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

relies upon ". . . a deeper philosophical level which includes more than esthetic values."[62] It refers to the speaker's sense of life.

This chapter has presented the basic attitudes of Ayn Rand's aesthetic point of view. The ideas presented in this chapter have many implications that were not mentioned here. Ayn Rand's aesthetic theory is of such a nature that it implies support of certain literary schools of thought and rather basic disagreement with other schools of thought. This issue will be considered in detail in the next chapter. Also, her ideas imply likes and dislikes of the way different writers express themselves. Her opinions about literary personalities will be discussed in chapter four.

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[62] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

AYN RAND'S ROMANTICISM

An attempt was made in the previous chapter to avoid any mention of terms like "realism," naturalism," or "romanticism." Ayn Rand holds very strong opinions upon the subject of literary schools. This could probably be inferred from her basic literary theory. She writes, "As far as literary schools are concerned, I would call myself a Romantic Realist."[1] Exactly what is a "Romantic Realist?" That will be one of the major concerns of this chapter, along with a concern for how "Romantic Realism" differs from other literary points of view. This chapter will also be concerned with the classification Ayn Rand gives to literature. A warning must be repeated at this point, however. In the first chapter the reader was warned about using his own definitions when trying to understand Ayn Rand. Her definitions are almost always slightly different from what would ordinarily be expected. The reader probably realized how true this is in reading the previous chapter. Care should also be exercised here. Her use of the term

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[1]Ayn Rand, The Goal of My Writing (New York, 1963), p. 7.

"romantic" should especially be noticed and understood before any value judgment is made as far as the merit of her approach is concerned.

Ayn Rand calls herself a "Romantic Realist." She makes more explicit her meaning in this passage:

> The Naturalist school of writing consists of substituting statistics for one's standard of value, then cataloguing minute, photographic, journalistic details of a given country, region, city, or back yard in a given decade, year, month or split-second, on the over-all premise of: "This is what men have done"--as against the premise of: "This is what men have chosen and/or should choose to do." This last is the premise of the Romantic school of writing, which deals, above all, with human values and, therefore, with the essential and the universal in human action, not with the statistical and the accidental. The Naturalist school records the choices which men happened to have made; the Romantic school projects the choices which men can and ought to make. I am a Romantic Realist--distinguished from the Romantic tradition in that the values I deal with pertain to this earth and to the basic problems of this era.[2]

A literary scholar of the Romantic period might want to quarrel with the opinion that the Romantic period was not dealing with life in contemporary Europe and America of its day, but the important concern here is Ayn Rand's classification of literary schools. Logically, she would have to oppose Naturalism. In the previous chapter her statements to the effect that literature ought to present a moral ideal were given. Therefore, no literary approach which

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[2]Ayn Rand, "Preface," We the Living (New York, 1959), pp. vi-vii.

did not present an ideal could get her approval. She could support no school of literature which claimed only to present life as it is. Ayn Rand is not concerned with "the people next door." Remember her statement that the good writer would seek to climb mountains in search of the rare, heroic virtues. She believes that Romantic literature was primarily concerned with values. She writes:

> Romanticism saw man as a being able to choose his values, to achieve his goals, to control his own existence. The Romantic writers did not regard man as a plaything of unknowable forces; they regarded him as a product of his own value-choices. They did not record the events that had happened, but projected the events that should happen; they did not record the choices men had made, but projected the choices men ought to make.[3]

Thus, it can be seen that Ayn Rand's attachment to Romanticism is derived from her basic literary attitudes and from the fact that both Romanticism, as she uses the term, and her philosophical ideas hold to certain beliefs about the nature of man. She justifies calling herself a Romantic Realist by saying that such a designation characterizes her as having a concern for values in the real world. Nathaniel Branden writes:

> They [her novels] are at once a continuation [of Romanticism]: she is a Romantic Realist. "Romantic"--because her work is concerned with values, with the essential, the abstract, the universal in human life, and with the projection of man as a heroic

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[3]Ayn Rand, "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age," The Objectivist Newsletter, I (November, 1962), 49.

> being. "Realist"--because the values she selects pertain to this earth and to man's actual nature, and because the issues with which she deals are the crucial and fundamental ones of our age. Her novels do not represent a flight into mystical fantasy or the historical past or into concerns that have little if any bearing on man's actual existence. Her heroes are not knights, gladiators or adventurers in some impossible kingdom, but engineers, scientists, industrialists, men who belong on earth, men who function in modern society.[4]

Ayn Rand would be a Romantic, if Romanticism is defined as a concern for values. However, she is not of the tradition that produced Walter Scott's novels of adventure, because they are set in the distant past (although Scott's novels do present actions and characters not typical of the age he portrays). Nor is she of the tradition that produced Byron's Manfred. She would view that poem as too fantastic. Nor is she of the literary tradition of the literary works in which the protagonist broods over his own problems. Yet all of these examples of the Romantic tradition would have to be viewed by her as having some merit, if for no other reason, then for their concern with human values.

Ayn Rand sees Romanticism as the final embodiment of a principle established in Aristotle's Poetics. She writes:

> The Romantic novel was the product of two factors, of reason and of capitalism: of the Aristotelian influence which, in the nineteenth century, gave man the confident power to choose

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[4]Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," in Who Is Ayn Rand? (New York, 1962), p. 88.

> his own goals--and of the politico-economic system that left him free to achieve them.[5]

Already Ayn Rand's answer to her question; "Why must fiction represent things 'as they might be and ought to be.'"[6] has been discussed. Notice the paraphrase of Aristotle's Poetics. Nathaniel Branden states also that Ayn Rand believes Romantic literature to be indebted to Aristotle. Notice again the paraphrase of Aristotle's Poetics. Branden writes:

> Her work is an accomplished embodiment of Aristotle's definition of the proper function of literature. "Things as they might be" is the principle of Realism: it means that fiction must stay within the bounds of reality, and not indulge in fantasies concerning the logically or metaphysically impossible. "Things as they ought to be" is the principle of Romanticism: it means things objectively possible and proper to man, things which he can and ought to choose.[7]

Branden writes in reference to the issue of whether such heroes as Ayn Rand writes about could exist or not:

> Do such men exist? She [Ayn Rand] asks: Should such men exist? That is the premise of art, as against the premise of history or biography. It is not a mirror reflecting the things behind them that her work holds up to men, but a beacon to be reached ahead.[8]

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Rand, The Goal of My Writing, p. 8.

[7] Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," pp. 97-98.

[8] Ibid., p. 98.

These statements do seem to be within the tradition of Aristotle's Poetics. What Aristotle actually said is as follows:

> The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse--you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and other a kind that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars.[9]

The first question that this continual reference to Aristotle raises is whether Ayn Rand simply holds the same view independently from Aristotle's concept and perhaps found that he had stated the same principle many centuries before or whether she owes a debt to Aristotle. In the letter to this writer of June 25, 1968, previously referred to, Nathaniel Branden stated in reference to a question from this writer as to whether Ayn Rand acknowledges any debt to any person for her literary opinions: "Miss Rand is entirely the originator of her own esthetic views." If this is true, then the reference to Aristotle is only one of a scholarly nature. After all, Aristotle expressed the concept first. However, there are also strong similarities between Ayn Rand's belief that art is a selective re-creation

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[9]Aristotle, Poetics, translated by Ingraham Bywater (New York, 1954), pp. 234-235.

of reality and Aristotle's belief that art is imitative of nature. Compare her statements to that effect in the previous chapter with this statement by Aristotle.

> Epic poetry and Tragedy, as also Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry, and most flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation.[10]

Aristotle then spends a number of paragraphs discussing the ways in which the various art forms are imitative of nature. Obviously, Ayn Rand has read the Poetics. Has there been an unconscious influence? Also, there is similarity between her concept of a "medium" for the expression of an art and Aristotle's "means." All that can be said for sure here is that, to this author's knowledge, no indebtedness has been publicly acknowledged. Ayn Rand's aesthetic theory was formulated after learning of Aristotle, but, according to her, she held her basic idea before learning of Aristotle. She writes:

> I decided to be a writer at the age of nine--it was a specific, conscious decision--I remember the day and the hour. I did not start by trying to describe the folks next door--but by inventing people who did things the folks next door would never do. I could summon no interest or enthusiasm for "people as they are"--when I had in my mind a binding picture of people as they could be.
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> I decided to become a writer--not in order to save the world, nor to serve my fellow men--but for the simple, personal, selfish, egoistical happiness of creating the kind of men and events I could like, respect, and admire. I can bear to

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[10] Ibid., p. 223.

> look around me levelly. I cannot bear to look down. I wanted to look up.
>
> This attitude has never changed. But I went for years thinking that it was strictly a personal attitude towards fiction writing, never to be discussed and of no interest to anyone but me. Later I discovered I had accepted as the rule of my lifework a principle stated by Aristotle. Aristotle said that fiction is of greater philosophical importance than history, because history represents things only as they are, while fiction represents them "as they might be and ought to be." If you wish a key to the literary method of my novels, this is it.[11]

Ayn Rand views the history of literature before the Romantic period as merely a prelude to that period. Pre-Romantic literature was less than totally literary to her because it did not have the element of "pure fiction" in it that allows the writer to create his own work: his own plot, theme, characterization, style.

> They [literary works before Romanticism] offered a recital of the events that had happened in the life of a man; the writer was, in effect, a biographer, a recorder of the given, the unalterable, the fated or determined. The emergence of a new literary form, the <u>novel</u>, in the late eighteenth century, represented a radical break with this tradition; the distinction of a novel is that it is a work of <u>pure fiction</u>, a story invented by its author and intended to be understood as such, rather than a fictionalized <u>chronicle</u> purporting to be a record of actual events.[12]

Pre-pure-fiction literature was pre-purely-literary literature. Spenser is less literary than, say, Dostoevsky. Shakespeare's

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[11] Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," pp. 87-88.

[12] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 93-94.

plays are less literary than those of Ibsen. Milton is less literary than Byron, according to this use of the term. Such a use of the term gives no attention to consideration of a writer's method as implying anything literary. Only whether a work is fictional or not is considered.

Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden also attack some of the predominant themes of the literature before the Romantic period. They believe that the chronicle approach, as they call it, is consistent with the fate motif, which they believe dominated literature before the Romantic period. Concerning pre-Romantic literature Nathaniel Branden writes:

> Man was presented as the plaything--sometimes the defiantly rebellious, sometimes the sadly resigned, but almost always the defeated plaything--of an inexorable fate beyond his control, which determined the ultimate course of his life, regardless of his choices, wishes or actions.[13]

To document this strong statement Branden gives examples from several periods of literature. He refers to Greek dramas, ". . . many of which were resolved by the arbitrary edict of a god. . . ."[14] Also, he refers to Shakespeare's dramas in which, he believes, the central tragic figures are controlled by their own passions and weaknesses. According to Nathaniel Branden, "Shakespeare presents heroic-sized figures, but he does not present man as hero; he merely 'holds up a mirror to life,' it is said."[15] Branden

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[13] Ibid., p. 93.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

then lumps a considerable amount of literature together, and says that ". . . the plays, epic poems, sagas and chronicles . . ." before the Romantic period have the same theme, that is ". . . man is the pawn of destiny, he is caught in a universe essentially inimical to his interests, and if he ever does succeed, it is not by his own efforts, but by fortuitous external circumstances."[16]

With Romanticism came a whole new point of view. Nathaniel Branden believes that Romanticism rejected the view that the author was to play the "role of transcriber." The Romantic author assumed the "role of creator."[17] Branden believes that the Romantic authors had to develop the significance of plot because their literature was concerned with values. "In the Romantic plot-novel, the course of man's life is determined by his chosen purposes, which he pursues through a series of relevant problems . . . ."[18] But, according to Nathaniel Branden, Romanticism "harbored a contradiction which ultimately defeated it."[19] The writers dramatized the idea that men had free will and that values were to be achieved upon this earth. They were defeated, however, because they held to the old morality, the morality consistent with the fatalistic, pre-Romantic attitude.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 94.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

> By escaping from the problems of the present, the Romanticists contradicted their own (implicit) basic philosophical belief in man's efficacy: they saw man as heroic, but life as tragic. They could not successfully project and concretize man's fulfillment on earth; neither the traditional values of mysticism nor the defiantly subjective values of their own could make such fulfillment possible. Taking flight into the historical past, or else taking refuge in novels of impossibly unrealistic sentimentality, the Romantic writers progressively became more vulnerable to the charge of "escapism" that was being raised against their work.[20]

Branden believes that there were a few notable exceptions. Victor Hugo's Les Misérables was considered a "rare exception"[21] to the escapism of Romantic literature in general.

The Naturalists were the ones who called Romanticism an escape, but Romantic literature was never really escapist. Ayn Rand writes boldly against such charges.

> It is only the superficiality of the naturalists that classifies Romanticism as "an escape"; this is true only in the very superficial sense of contemplating a glamorous vision as a relief from the gray burden of "real-life" problems. But in the deeper, metaphysical-moral-psychological sense, it is Naturalism that represents an escape--an escape from choice, from values, from moral responsibility--and it is Romanticism that trains and equips man for the battle he has to face in reality.[22]

Naturalism fails to give man an ideal. Since at a certain age, a person's growing normative abstractions depend upon

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[20] Ibid., p. 95.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ayn Rand, "Bootleg Romanticism," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (January, 1965), 4.

such a focal point, Naturalism becomes immoral. Only Romanticism can furnish the emotional orientation necessary for the developing person. Ayn Rand writes, "Romantic art is the fuel and the spark plug of a man's soul; its task is to set a soul on fire and never let it go out."[23] Naturalism does not then satisfy the psychological need which man has for art, as it was discussed in the previous chapter.

Another thing to consider is the effect of Naturalism upon the artist. In an interview Ayn Rand was once asked if a writer should reflect his own time. She replied:

> No. A writer should be an active intellectual leader of his time, not a passive follower riding any current. A writer should shape the values of his culture, he should project and concretize the value goals of man's life. This is the essence of the Romantic school of literature, which has all but vanished from today's scene.[24]

She elaborated her thought as follows when asked where this leaves literature:

> At the dead end of Naturalism. Naturalism holds that a writer must be a passive photographer or reporter who must transcribe uncritically whatever he happens to observe around him.[25]

Of course, the Naturalistic attitude stands in sharp contrast to the attitude of Ayn Rand as it has previously been

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[23]Ayn Rand, "Art and Moral Treason," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (March, 1965), 14.

[24]Ayn Rand, Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand, interviewed by Alvin Toffler (New York, 1964), p. 11.

[25]Ibid.

presented here. She finds many contradictions within the Naturalistic approach. In her essay entitled The Goal of My Writing, she discusses some of these. She says that there are two principles agreed upon by most theories of aesthetics: that is (1) that art is by nature selective and (2) that it is not utilitarian, but rather for contemplation.[26] She then asks the reader to consider Naturalism in the light of these two principles.

> . . . observe that these Naturalists--or the good writers among them--are extremely selective in regard to two attributes of literature: style and characterization. Without selectivity, it would be impossible to achieve any sort of characterization whatever, neither of an unusual man nor of an average one who is to be offered as statistically typical of a large segment of the population. Therefore, the Naturalist's opposition to selectivity applies to only one attribute of literature: the content or subject. It is in regard to his choice of subject that a novelist must exercise no choice, they claim.[27]

Ayn Rand says that Naturalists have never given a logical answer to this problem.

> To record what really happened is the job of a reporter or of an historian, not of a novelist. To enlighten readers and educate them? That is the job of science, not of literature, of non-fiction writing, not of fiction.[28]

She goes on to say that the purpose of literature cannot be to improve men because that would demand a standard and a moral purpose, and Naturalism claims that moral purposes

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[26] Rand, The Goal of My Writing, p. 5.

[27] Ibid. [28] Ibid.

are not proper in literature. Since art must be selective by its very nature, how then does Naturalism decide what is going to be the subject of literature? Obviously, within the scope of a work of art the writer cannot portray all of life. Ayn Rand says that the Naturalists answer this problem by saying that everyone decides except the novelist himself.

> The novelist--according to the Naturalist's doctrine--must neither judge nor value. He is not a creator, but only a recording secretary whose master is the rest of mankind. Let others pronounce judgments, make decisions, select goals, fight over values and determine the course, the fate and the soul of man. The novelist is the only outcast and deserter of that battle. His is not to reason why--his is only to trot behind his master, notebook in hand, taking down whatever the master dictates, picking up such pearls or such swinishness as the master may choose to drop.[29]

After this biting attack on Naturalism, Ayn Rand ends her discussion of the effect of Naturalism on the author by saying that as far as she is concerned, she has ". . . too much self-esteem for a job of that kind."[30]

Ayn Rand believes that Naturalism is a return to pre-Romantic standards in art. Nathaniel Branden writes:

> Naturalism--the literary counter-revolution against Romanticism--was regression to a pre-Romantic view of man, to a view lower than that against which Romanticists had rebelled. It was Naturalism that reintroduced the "fate" motif into literature, and once more presented man as the helpless plaything of irresistible forces.[31]

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[29] Ibid., p. 6. [30] Ibid.

[31] Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," p. 97.

As a result of this reintroduction of fate into literature, Naturalism has not always just presented life as it is. In an attempt to show how realistic Naturalistic writers are, according to Ayn Rand, they have revealed their ability to present life as being more and more ugly. Naturalism is to Ayn Rand, ". . . the doctrine which proposes to confine men to the sight of slums, poolrooms, movie posters, and on down, much farther down."[32]

> It is the Romantic or value-oriented vision of life that the Naturalists regard as "superficial"--and it is the vision which extends as far as the bottom of a garbage can that they regard as "profound."
> . . . . . .
> Scaling a mountain, they [the Naturalists] claim, is easy--but rolling in the gutter is a noteworthy achievement.[33]

Naturalism is then the literary antithesis of Ayn Rand's kind of Romantic Realism. Included as Naturalists are not only those writers who are commonly acknowledged as Naturalists but also some others. Nathaniel Branden says that he includes under this name also some writers who call themselves Realists. He writes:

> Zola attempted to distinguish his "Naturalism" from the "Realism" of Flaubert, but . . . no literary historian has ever succeeded in drawing a basic distinction between their respective methods and approaches.[34]

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[32]Rand, The Goal of My Writing, p. 10.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," p. 96.

Because Ayn Rand believes that anti-Romantic attitudes dominate modern literature, she finds little in it that she can admire. In an interview in 1964, she was asked her opinion of modern literature in general. She replied:

> Philosophically, immoral. Aesthetically, it bores me to death. It is degenerating into a sewer, devoted exclusively to studies of depravity. And there's nothing as boring as depravity.[35]

She believes that values have been divorced from modern literature, and since the expression of values is to her one of the most important aspects of art, then she can find little that meets her qualifications for good literature. Nathaniel Branden has written:

> If Romanticism was defeated by the fact that its values were removed from this world, the alternative offered by Naturalism was to remove values from literature. The result today is an esthetic vacuum, left by the historical implication that men's only choice is between artistic projections of near-fantasy--or Sunday supplement exposes, gossip columns and psychological case-histories parading as novels.[36]

Of course, from what has come before, Ayn Rand's opinion here is clear. She wants literature to be concerned with human values, that is, virtues such as courage, honesty, productivity, but she does not want these virtues to be projected only in some fantasy land. She wants the virtues

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[35] Rand, Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand, p. 11.

[36] Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," p. 97.

to be projected among believable characters in realistic settings. This is why she has found it necessary to classify herself in such a way that she does not fit into standard literary patterns. Romantic Realism is for her a point of view combining the concern for values found in Romantic literature with the Realism that places these values in situations where readers can identify with the work and relate it to themselves and their own life situations.

This synthesis is not what she finds in contemporary literature. In an article entitled "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age," Ayn Rand discusses in some detail her disagreement with much of modern literature. Some of her arguments have been discussed earlier, but an attempt will be made here to follow her arguments as they appear, so that a complete understanding of her attitude can be obtained.

She begins the article by explaining what she thinks literature was like prior to the rise of Romanticism:

> Prior to the nineteenth century, literature presented man as a helpless being whose life and actions were determined by forces beyond his control: either by fate and the gods, as in the Greek tragedies, or by an innate weakness, "a tragic flaw," as in the plays of Shakespeare. Writers regarded man as metaphysically impotent, incapable of achieving his goals or of directing the course of his life; their basic premise was determinism. On that premise, one could not project what might happen to men; one could only record what did happen--and chronicles were the appropriate literary form of such recording.[37]

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[37]Ayn Rand, "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age," The Objectivist Newsletter, I (November, 1962), 49.

Ayn Rand says that man, as a being of free will, did not appear in literature until the rise of Romanticism, "the great new movement in art."[38] How did the image of man presented in Romantic art differ from the pre-Romantic presentation?

> Romanticism saw man as a being able to choose his values, to achieve his goals, to control his own existence. The Romantic writers did not regard man as a plaything of unknowable forces; they regarded him as a product of his own value-choices. They did not regard the events that had happened, but projected the events that should happen; they did not record the choices men made, but projected the choices men ought to make.[39]

The novel was the appropriate form for this type of literary activity. Two forces had caused the novel to come into being. First, the influence of Aristotle produced an emphasis on reason. This emphasis "gave man the confident power to choose his own goals . . . ."[40] The second contributory cause of the novel was capitalism. Capitalism "left him [man] free to achieve them [his goals]."[41] Ayn Rand believes that mysticism, the antithesis of reason, and collectivism, the antithesis of capitalism, became the dominant intellectual trends in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result, Romanticism was gradually replaced with a literary trend that was more in accord with

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

mysticism and collectivism. "Man's new enemy, in art, was Naturalism."[42]

Naturalism rejected the attitudes of the Romantics. It rejected the idea of free will and returned to the pre-Romantic belief that man's destiny was to be determined by forces outside his control. But, ". . . now the new ruler of man's destiny was held to be society."[43] The Naturalists opposed the presence of values in literature and wished literature to present men "as they are." This, for Ayn Rand, means that writers "must record whatever they happen to see around them."[44]

> This was a return to the literary principle of the chronicle--but since a novel was to be an invented chronicle; the novelist was faced with the problem of what to use as his standard of selection. When values are declared to be impossible, how is one to know what to record, what to regard as important or significant? Naturalism solved this problem by substituting statistics for a standard of value.[45]

Therefore, according to Ayn Rand, any literary work which claimed to represent the life of some group in some place or other could claim to have literary merit. As a result, "That which was rare, unusual, exceptional, was regarded as unimportant and unreal."[46] Naturalism gave up any attempt to answer the question: What is man? Instead, Naturalistic

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

literature would respond, "This is what the village grocers are, in the south of France, in the year 1887."[47] As a result, Naturalism was anti-philosophical. It refused to ask the "great" questions about human existence, and it refused to give any generalized answer. By this process, art ". . . was shrinking to the level of a plodding concrete-bound dolt who has never looked past the block he lives on or beyond the range of the moment."[48]

Naturalism is the literary school that still rules literary thought in modern times. Since art does represent a metaphysical view of man, whether Naturalists like it or not, Naturalism is committed to a view of man. Ayn Rand writes, "Man . . . is now represented by dipsomaniacs, drug addicts, sexual perverts, homicidal maniacs, and psychotics."[49] What are the themes that Naturalism presents?

> The subjects of modern literature are such themes as: the hopeless love of a bearded lady for a mongoloid pin-head in a circus side show--or: the problem of a married couple whose child was born with six fingers on her left hand--or: the tragedy of a gentle young man who just can't help murdering strangers in the park for kicks.[50]

Ayn Rand says that this type of literature claims to represent "a slice of life" or "real life." Naturalism has thus become involved in a contradiction. It first attacked

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

Romanticism for not representing the average, but it (Naturalism) represents the unusual and claims that this is what all men are _really_ like.

> The obvious question, to which the heirs of statistical Naturalism have to answer, is: if heroes and geniuses are not to be regarded as representative of mankind, by reason of their numerical rarity, why are freaks and monsters to be regarded as representative? Why are the problems of a bearded lady of greater universal significance than the problems of a genius? Why is the soul of a murderer worth studying, but not the soul of a hero?[51]

Ayn Rand believes that the reason for this concern for the depraved in literature is that Naturalism is committed to a philosophical view of man. Here again she emphasizes that elements of importance in literature, theme, style, subject matter, for example, are related closely to philosophical concepts and are expressions of those basic concepts. Naturalism's philosophical concepts are "anti-man, anti-mind, anti-life."[52]

What is seen in modern literature now, she claims, is really no longer Naturalism. This literature is not derived from a journalistic or statistical approach. Instead, it is Symbolism.

> . . . it is the presentation of a _metaphysical_ view of man, as opposed to a journalistic or statistical view. But it is the Symbolism of the jungle. According to this modern view, _depravity_ represents man's real, essential, metaphysical nature, while virtue does not;

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[51] _Ibid_.

[52] _Ibid_.

> virtue is only an accident, an exception or an illusion; therefore, a monster is a consistent projection of man's essence, but a hero is not.[53]

Romantic fiction is the opposite of modern Symbolistic literature. Both represent a metaphysical view of man, but the views of man represented by Romanticism is the opposite of that represented by modern Symbolism.

> The Romanticists presented heroes as "larger than life"; now, monsters are presented as "larger than life"--or, rather, man is presented as "smaller than life."[54]

Ayn Rand believes that a hidden motive can be found behind modern literature. This motive is derived from the concepts of modern philosophy.

> If men hold a rational philosophy, including the conviction that they possess free will, the image of a hero guides and inspires them. If men hold an irrational philosophy, including the conviction that they are helpless automatons, the image of a monster serves to reassure them; they feel, in effect: "I am not that bad."[55]

Ayn Rand is again expressing an idea that is an essential part of her aesthetic theory. In the discussion of her basic theory, the idea was explained; here there is an application of this idea to a particular situation. The rational man and the irrational man both seek in art an expression of their basic values. The rational man, as Ayn Rand defines him, seeks a Romantic world, because he

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

desires to be inspired to go further. The irrational man seeks an excuse to avoid all effort. In short, for the irrational man, Ayn Rand believes: "The philosophical meaning or the vested interest of presenting man as a loathsome monstrosity is the hope and the demand for a moral blank check."[56]

The picture Ayn Rand paints of modern literature is not, from her point of view a very optimistic one. She believes that the progress made by the Romantics is largely being ignored and that literature is regressing towards pre-Romantic literary forms and themes.

> Observe that literature is returning to the art form of the pre-industrial age, to the chronicle--that fictionalized biographies of "real" people, of politicians, baseball players or Chicago gangsters, are given preference over works of imaginative fiction, in the theater, in the movies, in television--and that a favored literary form is the documentary. Observe that in painting, sculpture and music the current vogue, fashion and inspirational model is the primitive art of the jungle.[57]

The picture Ayn Rand paints of contemporary literature is pessimistic, but it is characteristic of her way of thinking that the present is bankrupt but hope is the proper emotion to feel about the future. Once she was asked if she thought herself to be the last of the Romanticists. Her reply was, "Or the first of their return. . . ."[58] Typically, she ends

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., p. 50.

[58] Rand, Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand, p. 11.

her article on "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age" by recommending that the reader study the stories of O. Henry or listen to Viennese operetta and compare the sense of life found in these two sources of art with the type of modern literature she has been talking about. She says that this was the type of literature produced when reason was a powerful force in culture. She asks the reader to decide which view of man, that of the Naturalists or that of the Romanticists, is the one that deserves to be the proper generalization about man's nature.

"The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age" presents the basic attitude of Ayn Rand towards contemporary literature, but in other articles she has attempted to apply these basic attitudes to individual literary types. In an article entitled "Bootleg Romanticism" she discusses the significance of the modern "thriller." In this article Ayn Rand analyzes this particular type of literature, but in a particular context. She regards art as a cultural indicator. If the art degenerates, that is a sign that the culture in which it is produced is degenerating also.

> Art (including literature) is the barometer of a culture. It reflects the sum of a society's deepest philosophical values: not its professed notions and slogans, but its actual view of man and of existence. The image of an entire society stretched out on a psychologist's couch, revealing its naked subconscious, is an impossible concept, yet <u>that</u> is what art accomplishes: it presents the equivalent of such a session, a transcript

> which is more eloquent and easier to diagnose than any other set of symptoms.[59]

She says that art is an indicator of the philosophical conditions to be found in a culture, but she admits that there are usually, of course, rebels against a dominant cultural force. In the field of art, however, if rational, creative people do not enter the field and irrational, incompetent people do enter the field, then that is a sign that certain forces are at work in aesthetics. The art produced in a culture may even be ignored by most of the people of that culture, but again if it is what is produced, then it is an indicator of at least the intellectual direction the culture is taking.

What then is the meaning of the art found in our culture? Before an answer can be given to that question, the picture modern art does present must be made clear.

> The composite picture of man that emerges from the art of our time is the gigantic figure of an aborted embryo whose limbs suggest a vaguely anthropoid shape, who twists his upper extremity in a frantic quest for a light that cannot penetrate its empty sockets, who emits inarticulate sounds resembling snarls and moans, who crawls through a bloody muck, red froth dripping from his jaws, and struggles to throw the froth at his own non-existent face, who pauses periodically and, lifting the stumps of his arms, screams in abysmal terror at the universe at large.[60]

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[59] Ayn Rand, "Bootleg Romanticism," The Objectivist Newsletter, IV (January, 1965), 1.

[60] Ibid.

About the sense of life to be found in modern art's presentation of the essential nature of man, three emotions seem to dominate: fear, guilt, and pity.

> Fear, as the appropriate emotion of a creature deprived of his means of survival, his mind; guilt, as the appropriate emotion of a creature devoid of moral values; pity, as the means of escape from these two, as the only response such a creature could beg for.[61]

These three emotions "combine to set the trend of art in the same direction."[62] The artist who has accepted the view of life presented by modern philosophy reveals an unusual process of creativity. "To justify his chronic fear, one has to portray existence as evil . . . ."[63] In order to justify the guilt the artist feels and to arouse the pity he desires, he must "portray man as impotent and innately loathsome."[64] Ayn Rand believes that this psychological process is what has caused "the frantic search for misery . . ."[65] that she believes to be the dominant mood of modern art.

In the field of literature particularly, Ayn Rand believes that the defenders of the type of art described above attempt to "take over" popular, commercially successful art forms. As a result, an attempt has been

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

made to use the popular success of "thrillers" to destroy the very popularity such works have created. Thrillers are basically Romantic in their outlook.

> "Thrillers" are detective, spy or adventure stories. Their basic characteristic is conflict, which means, a clash of goals, which means, purposeful action in pursuit of values. Thrillers are the product, the popular offshoot, of the Romantic school of art that sees man, not as a helpless pawn of fate, but as a being of free will whose life is directed by his own value-choices.[66]

Thrillers are to Ayn Rand a "simplified, elementary version of Romantic literature."[67] Thrillers take fundamental values for granted. They are concerned with only one type of conflict of values. They are concerned with "the battle of good against evil in terms of purposeful action . . . ."[68] Thrillers embody a basic pattern found in Romantic art: "choice, goal, conflict, danger, struggle, victory."[69] In modern art only the barest remnant of Romanticism remains, and that remnant is primarily to be found in thrillers.

What place do such works hold in our modern age with its "esthetic vacuum?"

> The social status of thrillers reveals the profound gulf splitting today's culture--the gulf between the people and its alleged intellectual leaders. The people's need for a ray of Romanticism's light is enormous and tragically eager. Observe the extraordinary popularity of Mickey Spillane and Ian Fleming. There are

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

> hundreds of thriller writers, who, sharing the modern sense of life, write sordid concoctions that amount to a battle of evil against evil or, at best, gray against black. None of them have the ardent, devoted, almost addicted following earned by Spillane and Fleming. This is not to say that the novels of Spillane and Fleming project a faultlessly rational sense of life, both are touched by the cynicism and despair of today's "malevolent universe"; but, in strikingly different ways, both offer the cardinal element of Romantic fiction. Mike Hammer and James Bond are heroes.[70]

There are, according to Ayn Rand, attempts being made to "ride" on the success of the thrillers, an attempt to destroy their success by laughing at the heroes they hold up. She gives as an example a television program called "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." Ayn Rand quotes from the producers of that program. The producers seemed to have consciously intended to create a pseudo-hero that could be made fun of. Also, she discusses a British program called "The Avengers" that was so subtle that the audience refused to laugh at the show and made it a success by taking it seriously. Ayn Rand says that one of the important elements of such "bootleg Romanticism" is that the audience cannot tell who are the "bad guys" and who are the "good guys." The purposes of villains on "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." are seldom made even partially known. Sometimes the viewers never really know who these villains really are. The audience is never told the motivation behind the actions of the characters.

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[70] Ibid., p. 2.

> As a result of such material, the stories fail to coagulate. It is impossible to tell who is doing what or why. There is no plot structure, no motivation, no goals, no values, no conflict, no suspense--nothing but brute physical danger in the midst of radar screens, nuclear rockets and science-fiction paraphernalia.[71]

What have been represented as thrillers on television have also been seen on the movie screen. Ayn Rand believes that the first James Bond movie was completely serious.

> . . . there was nothing "tongue-in-cheek" about the first of these James Bond movies, Dr. No. It was a brilliant example of Romantic screen art--in production, direction, writing, photography, and, most particularly, in the performance of Sean Connery. His first introduction on the screen was a gem of dramatic technique, elegance, wit and understatement: when, in response to a question about his name, we saw his first closeup and he answered quietly: "Bond, James Bond"--the audience, on the night I saw it, burst into applause.[72]

From this heroic beginning the James Bond movies have declined. From Russia with Love was "at times, unintelligible."[73] When Ayn Rand wrote this article Goldfinger had just been released. She says that she will go to see it, but she is not optimistic about the merits of the movie. Now, after other Bond movies, Ayn Rand's statements have been proven true. The James Bond movies have become a "spoof" on, of all things, the James Bond movies. Ayn Rand cautions against the acceptance of ideas under the guise of humor. She writes:

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[71] Ibid., p. 3.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

> Remember that humor is not an unconditional virtue and depends on its object. One may laugh with a hero, but never at him--just as a satire may laugh at some object, but never at itself. A composition that laughs at itself is a fraud on the audience.[74]

Ayn Rand believes that this sub-genre of thrillers cannot be classified as satire.

> Such is the basic contradiction--and the terrible, parasitic immorality--of any attempt to create "tongue-in-cheek" thrillers. It requires that one employ all the values of a thriller in order to hold the audience's interest, yet turn these values against themselves, that one damage the very element one is using and counting on. It means an attempt to cash in on the thing one is mocking, to profit by the audience's hunger for Romanticism while seeking to destroy it. This is not the method of a legitimate satire: a satire does not share the values of that which it denounces: it denounces by means and in the context of an opposite set of values.[75]

Nevertheless, "real" thrillers are an important art form, because they do present moral conflict. They are taken, says Ayn Rand, symbolically.

> What people seek in thrillers is the spectacle of man's efficacy: of his ability to fight for his values and to achieve them. What they see is a condensed, simplified pattern, reduced to its essentials: a man fighting for a vital goal--overcoming one obstacle after another--facing terrible dangers and risks--persisting through an excruciating struggle--and winning. Far from suggesting an easy or "unrealistic" view of life, a thriller suggests the necessity of a difficult struggle; if the hero is "larger-than life," so are the villains and the dangers . . . .

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., p. 4.

> What men find in the spectacle of the ultimate triumph of the good is the inspiration to fight for one's own values in the moral conflicts of one's own life.[76]

Some people, according to Ayn Rand, would protest against thrillers on the ground that "life is not like that." They would say that happiness is not guaranteed to man. To this criticism Ayn Rand responds by claiming that thrillers are realistic because they show men what must be done if happiness is ever to be achieved. That is, men must utilize their abilities to overcome obstacles just as a James Bond or, for that matter, a Howard Roark would.

> Inspired by James Bond, a man may find the courage to rebel against the impositions of his in-laws--or to ask for a deserved raise--or to change his job--or to propose to the girl he loves--or to embark on the career he wants--or to defy the whole world for the sake of his new invention.[77]

Ayn Rand wants to see heroes on the screen, and she condemns any work of art that fails to provide a hero for admiration. Earlier she was quoted as having said that she wanted to look up. This attitude is the source of most of her criticism of modern literature. Modern literature does not provide anything worth looking up to.

Naturalistic literature does provide here and there a character that can be sympathetically understood, but such a character is far from an ideal that can inspire the reader or member of the audience to some ambitious goal. As an example,

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[76] Ibid. [77] Ibid.

Ayn Rand discusses "one of the best works of modern naturalism."[78] She refers to Paddy Chayefsky's Marty.

> It is an extremely sensitive, perceptive, touching portrayal of an humble man's struggle for self-assertion. One can feel sympathy for Marty, and a sad kind of pleasure at his final success. But it is highly doubtful whether anyone--including the thousands of real-life Martys--would be inspired by his example. Nobody could feel: "I want to be like Marty." Everybody (except the most corrupt) can feel: "I want to be like James Bond."[79]

Ayn Rand concludes "Bootleg Romanticism" by saying that the rejection of naturalistic literature must be made by those who produce and those who consume literature, who do not accept the values of Naturalism. If people want to have Romantic literature, then they must reject the "Joyce-Kafka Amendment, which prohibits the sale and drinking of clean water, unless denatured by humor, while unconscionable rotgut is being sold and drunk at every bookstore counter."[80]

Although Ayn Rand disapproves of such television shows as "The Man from U.N.C.L.E.," there are a few programs she likes. One of these programs she likes is "The Untouchables." On July 8, 1962, her column in the Los Angeles Times defended "The Untouchables" against some of the attacks on that program that were widespread. She states that crime stories and mysteries were the center of attack. These stories

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

were attacked for their violence, but Ayn Rand believes that the attack on violence was only a cover for an attack of a more fundamental nature.

> The truth of the matter is the exact opposite of their allegations: the appeal of crime stories and Westerns does not lie in the element of violence, but in the element of moral conflict and moral purpose.[81]

Ayn Rand believes that the attacks on such shows were based on the fact that some of these shows have a tendency to be Romantic.

> Crime stories and Westerns are the last remnant of romanticism on our airwaves. No matter how primitive their terms, they deal with the most realistic issue of man's life: the battle of good and evil. They present man as a purposeful being who is able to choose his goals, to fight for his values, to resist disaster, to struggle and to win. The best of such stories offer the invaluable elements of a purposeful plot structure, of ingenuity and suspense, of the daring, the unusual, the exciting.[82]

This type of literature stands in obvious contrast to so-called serious drama and "'sophisticated' crime stories . . . ."[83] These two types of art are unheroic and naturistic in their outlook.

For Ayn Rand, "'The Untouchables' is one of the most successful programs and fully deserves its success."[84] She believes that "The Untouchables" is "a profoundly moral show."[85] Why?

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[81] Ayn Rand, "The New Enemies of 'The Untouchables,'" The Objectivist Newsletter, I (August, 1962), 36.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

> In writing, acting and direction, it is a masterpiece of stylized characterization. It captures the essence of the gangster psychology: the irrationality, the hysteria, the chronic terror, the panic. These gangsters are neither glamorized strongmen nor innocent "victims of society"; they are scared rats. They are presented as loathsome, but not frightening, because not powerful; they are presented as contemptible. No child or adult could ever feel inspired to emulate a Frank Nitti.[86]

This statement may be regarded as what Ayn Rand thinks the "proper" villain should be in a story. He would no doubt offer a contrast to a hero. "The Untouchables" does, according to Ayn Rand, provide such a hero. ". . . Robert Stack's superlative portrayal of Eliot Ness is the most inspiring image on today's screen, the only image of a real hero."[87] The opposition to "The Untouchables" is characteristic of the modern naturalistic attitude. "It is part of today's profound revolt against man, against the intellect, against human efficacy, and, above all, against moral values."[88]

Ayn Rand has applied her ideas to literary points of view, and she has analyzed modern literature in reference to her standards. In addition, she has also formulated opinions about individual writers. Occasionally her opinions about individual writers have been indicated in the process of explaining her ideas. However, so far, no attempt has

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

been made to analyze her evaluation of the works of other authors in any detail. That will be the concern of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

AYN RAND'S FAVORITE WRITERS

Ayn Rand was a young woman who was sensitive to the events of the Russian Revolution. She found life in Russia after those events almost intolerable. Extraordinary physical and mental effort were required to maintain her affirmative sense of life while watching the destruction during the early days of Lenin's government. During these years she discovered the novels of Victor Hugo, who became her favorite novelist. Even today when asked: "Are there any novelists whom you admire?" her reply is: "Yes. Victor Hugo."[1] Barbara Branden, in her biographical sketch of Ayn Rand, writes:

> It was against the background of these events of the Russian Revolution that she discovered the novels of Victor Hugo. She first read The Man Who Laughs. Then she read Les Misérables: then all the rest of Hugo's novels. It was the discovery of a world of unprecedented scope and grandeur, of magnificently ingenious plots, of inexhaustible imaginativeness, of an exalted sense of life, of man seen as a hero. It was a world swept free of the commonplace and the trite--a world dedicated to the exciting, the dramatic, the important. There were many of Hugo's specific ideas and values

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[1] Ayn Rand, Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand, interviewed by Alvin Toffler (New York, 1964), p. 11.

> with which she knew, even then, that she could not agree. But what she felt, without the words to name it fully, was that this was literature "as it might be and ought to be."[2]

Hugo was mentioned by Ayn Rand on several occasions that have been mentioned earlier. She referred to Hugo's style as "a blend of reason and passionate emotion . . . ."[3] In the same article she says:

> . . . I love the work of Victor Hugo, in a deeper sense than admiration for his superlative literary genius, and I find great similarities between his sense of life and mine, although I disagree with virtually all of his explicit philosophy.[4]

Later in the same article while discussing the idea of a sense of life, she says that Hugo "gives me the feeling of entering a cathedral . . . ."[5]

As can be seen from the above statements, Ayn Rand is attracted to Hugo's sense of life. In Ninety-Three there is a scene which Ayn Rand believes expresses one of the aspects of Hugo's dramatic sense of life that she admires. The passage reads:

> Then, without haste, slowly and proudly, he stepped over the window sill and, without turning back, erect, with his back to the rungs and the fire behind him, facing the void, he began descending the ladder in silence, with the majesty of a

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[2]Barbara Branden, "A Biographical Essay: Who is Ayn Rand?" in Who Is Ayn Rand? (New York, 1962), p. 158.

[3]Ayn Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," The Objectivist, V (March, 1966), 6.

[4]Ibid., p. 8.

[5]Ibid.

> phantom. Those who were on the ladder hurried down it. Everyone who saw him shuddered and drew back; around that man arriving from above there was an aura of sacred horror as around a vision. He gravely strode into the darkness before him; as they stepped back, he moved toward them; his marble pallor was expressionless, there was no light in his ghostly gaze; with each step that he took toward those men whose frightened eyes stared at him in the shadows, he seemed to grow larger; the ladder shook and creaked beneath his ominous tread, and he looked like the statue of the commander going back into the grave.
>
> When the marquis was at the bottom, when he had reached the last rung of the ladder and put his foot on the ground, a hand came down on his shoulder. He turned around.
>
> "I arrest you," said Cimourdain.
>
> "You are right," said Lantenac.[6]

Ayn Rand says in an article that first appeared in the Los Angeles Times on September 16, 1962, that she first heard that scene read as a child.

> I heard this scene when I was seven years old, lying awake in the darkness, listening intently. It was my mother reading a French novel to my grandmother in the living room, and all I could hear was a few snatches. But they gave me the sense of some tremendous drama resolving events of unimaginable importance.
>
> I did not ask what book that scene came from, since I was not supposed to be listening. It remained in my mind as a brilliant flash; I did not expect to find it again nor to learn the mystery of such questions as who was arrested and why.
>
> I was thirteen when I found it, with a sudden shock of recognition, in the closing chapters of a magnificent novel . . . .[7]

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[6] Victor Hugo, Ninety-Three, translated by Lowell Bair (New York, 1962), p. 289.

[7] Ayn Rand, Review of Ninety-Three by Victor Hugo, Objectivist Newsletter, I (October, 1962), 42.

After many years, what does Ayn Rand think of that same scene now? She writes:

> That scene was not as good as I thought--it was better. It was incomparably better than anything I could have imagined. It was the climax of so enormous a drama, the resolution of such profound moral conflicts, that it left one stunned by the experience of what great literature is really like; after which, one does not settle for any lesser values, neither in books nor in life.[8]

In 1962 Ayn Rand wrote an introduction to Ninety-Three for Bantam Books. She says that she almost envies readers who can discover Victor Hugo for the first time.[9] In that introduction she writes:

> The distance between his [Hugo's] world and ours is astonishingly short--he died in 1885--but the distance between his universe and ours has to be measured in esthetic light-years. He is virtually unknown to the American public but for some vandalized remnants on our movie screens. His works are seldom discussed in the literary courses of our universities. He is buried under the esthetic rubble of our day--while gargoyles leer at us again, not from the spires of cathedrals, but from the pages of shapeless, unfocused, ungrammatical novels about drug addicts, bums, killers, dipsomaniacs, psychotics. He is as invisable to the neo-barbarians of our age as the art of Rome was to their spiritual ancestors, and for the same reasons. Yet Victor Hugo is the greatest novelist in world literature.[10]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ayn Rand, "Introduction," in Ninety-Three by Victor Hugo, translated by Lowell Bair (New York, 1962), p. vii.

The distance between Hugo's sense of life and that of modern literature can be found in the discussion of the difference between Romanticism and Naturalism. However, the distinction can be made vivid by contrasting Hugo with Emile Zola. Nathaniel Branden writes:

> . . . contrast the heroic sense of life projected in the novels of . . . Victor Hugo with the sordid and doomed sense of life conveyed in the novels of . . . Emile Zola. Consider the literary means by which each writer's sense of life is projected. Where Hugo builds purposeful plot, Zola unravels calamitous contingency; where Hugo dramatizes the conflict of crucial values, Zola describes the horror of torpid depravity; where Hugo delineates characters in terms of their fundamental motivation, Zola lingers on the surface of accidental, journalistic minutiae; where Hugo presents life as exciting and man as a giant, Zola presents life as futility and man as a pygmy; where Hugo sees literature as artistic creation, Zola sees literature as history.[11]

An example of the basic difference Branden sees between Hugo and Zola can be seen by comparing two of their more vivid scenes. The scene Ayn Rand remembered hearing as a child occurs when the leader of the exiled aristocracy saves some children from a burning castle knowing that he will be captured by the enemy if he does save them. He returns to the castle as soon as he sees the situation. He climbs down the ladder with the children, only to be arrested by the leader of the republican forces. By saving the children,

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[11]Nathaniel Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," in Who Is Ayn Rand? (New York, 1962), pp. 90-91.

the leader of a then rebellious district of France places himself in the hands of his enemies which means certain death.

Now contrast Hugo's exciting, dramatic plot development with Zola's. There is a scene in Germinal which will make the difference clear. Near the end of the novel the reader learns that a mine has collapsed. Three of the miners at the bottom of the mine are important characters in the novel, one woman and two men who are jealous of her love. After a struggle one of the men is killed. The water in the pit rises. At one point the two lovers are perched precariously on a slippery ledge in total darkness with water up almost to their waists. They are half starved and the only source of nourishment is the water they are in. But the corpse of the dead man has made the water taste of blood in addition to the fact that the current keeps pushing the decaying corpse against the legs of the two people who are alive.[12]

Because Ayn Rand believes that art presents a universalized statement about the essential nature of man, her revulsion at such a scene can be imagined to be almost complete. The vast difference of attitude regarding almost everything aesthetic that separates Zola and Rand is perhaps

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[12]Emile Zola, Germinal, translated by Willard Trask (New York, 1962), pp. 410-427.

the reason why he is usually her target when she wants to get really indignant over the meaning of Naturalism.

Hugo is regarded, however, as Branden's quotation above indicates, as the literary opposite of Zola. Hugo's sense of life is seen by Ayn Rand as an extremely important source of "fuel" for the modern reader.

> . . . for those readers who do not see why the kind of people that bore them to death or disgust them in "real life" should hold a monopoly on the role of literary subjects, for those readers who are deserting "serious" literature in growing numbers and searching for the last afterglow of Romanticism in detective fiction, Hugo is the new continent they have been longing to discover.[13]

Hugo is an important source of psychological strength to withstand the tensions of ordinary life.

> If you are struggling to hold your vision of man above the gray ashes of our century, Hugo is the fuel you need.
>
> One cannot preserve that vision or achieve it without some knowledge of what is greatness and some image to concretize it. Every morning, when you read today's headlines, you shrink a little in human stature and hope. Then, if you turn to modern literature for a nobler view of man, you are confronted by those cases of arrested development--the juvenile delinquents aged 30 to 60--who still think that depravity is daring or shocking, and whose writings belong, not on paper, but on fences.
>
> If you feel, as I do, that there's nothing as boring as depravity, if you seek a glimpse of human grandeur--turn to a novel by Victor Hugo.[14]

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[13] Rand, "Introduction," p. xi.

[14] Rand, Review of Ninety-Three, p. 42.

Ayn Rand's favorite character from all of Hugo's novels is found in Les Misérables. It was not Jean Valjean, the central character of the novel, nor was it Marius, whom she regarded as a "weak, sentimental young man."[15] Her favorite character was Enjolras, the heroically dedicated leader of the French rebels.[16] If the reader wishes to understand what kind of a hero Ayn Rand likes to see in literature, the description of Enjolras in Les Misérables would serve as a valuable piece of evidence.

> Enjolras was a charming young man, who was capable of being terrible. He was angelically beautiful. He was Antinous wild. You would have said, to see the thoughtful reflection of his eye, that he had already, in some preceding existence, passed through the revolutionary apocalypse. He had the tradition of it like an eye-witness. He knew all the little details of the grand thing, a pontifical and warrior nature, strange in a youth. He was officiating and militant; from the immediate point of view, a soldier of democracy; above the movement of the time, a priest of the ideal. . . . He had but one passion, the right; but one thought, to remove all obstacles. Upon Mount Aventine, he would have been Gracchus; in the Convention, he would have been Saint Just. He hardly saw the roses, he ignored the spring, he did not hear the birds sing; Evadne's bare bosom would have moved him no more than Aristogeiton; to him, as to Harmodius, flowers were good only to hide the sword. He was severe in his pleasures. Before everything but the republic, he chastely dropped his eyes. He was the marble lover of liberty. His speech was roughly

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[15]Barbara Branden, "A Biographical Essay: Who Is Ayn Rand?" p. 159.

[16]Ibid., p. 158.

> inspired and had the tremor of a hymn. He astonished you by his soaring.[17]

This "marble lover of liberty" bears some resemblance to Ayn Rand's own John Galt. The important thing, however, is that here are the qualities of a hero she can admire. He is dedicated to a purpose and the struggle he faces is a moral struggle. Enjolras is involved in a struggle against tyranny. In a pamphlet which is also an order blank for books available from Nathaniel Branden Institute several of Hugo's works are recommended. Les Misérables is advertised as a classic archetype of a grand-scale social novel. It is regarded as a passionate protest novel against social injustice. The emphasis is still, however, upon the plot-structure of the novel. The same advertisement states that Les Misérables has a superlatively dramatic plot-structure built around the life-long pursuit of an ex-convict by a ruthless representative of the law. Although Ayn Rand admires Victor Hugo for his style and his sense of life, as has been indicated above, she also admires him for his plot-structure. The pamphlet quoted above indicates this fact as well as does the quote by Nathaniel Branden comparing Victor Hugo and Emile Zola. A strong interest in plot could only be expected after the statements about plot from Ayn Rand's writings which were presented in previous chapters.

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[17]Victor Hugo, Les Miserables, translated by Charles E. Wilbour (New York), pp. 547-548.

Ayn Rand first read The Man Who Laughs. In 1967 the newly organized NBI Press published an edition of that novel. In an introduction which Ayn Rand wrote for that edition, she says that The Man Who Laughs is her favorite novel by Victor Hugo, and she tells why:

> The Man Who Laughs is Victor Hugo's best novel. . . . It is a work in which Hugo's imagination, freed of lesser concerns, creates a universe built in his own image and likeness. It is a dramatization of his view of man's existence--presented in the form and the violent action of a suspense story.[18]

She points out that this was not Hugo's conscious purpose when he wrote the novel.[19] What happened was ". . . conflict between his conscious ideas and his sense of life . . . ."[20] In The Man Who Laughs this conflict reached its climax. Which way did Hugo go? "Here, his sense of life is the dominant element that overwhelms the rest."[21] An interesting point to note is that Ayn Rand's favorite novel by Victor Hugo is also the one that she believes to be the best example of Hugo's ability to construct powerful, imaginative plot-structures.

> The story of The Man Who Laughs is the most dramatic, ingenious and tightly integrated of Hugo's plot-structures. Regrettably, it is somewhat over-burdened with the lengthy historical essays which

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[18] Ayn Rand, "An Introductory Note," in The Man Who Laughs by Victor Hugo (New York, 1967).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

> he included in all his novels. . . . It is as if the author were attempting to anchor his story to concrete, "journalistic" reality, where it does not belong, by means of an overabundance of historical details--an unnecessary concession to naturalism, which demands patience from the reader.[22]

The plot structure of The Man Who Laughs centers about a scene of high dramatic intensity about which Ayn Rand has stated: "I have never envied other writers; but in all literature, this is the one scene I wish I had written."[23] That scene occurs on the open sea.

> "In that darkness, they heard the doctor saying:
>
> "'Let us pray.'
>
> "They knelt.
>
> "It was no longer in the snow, it was in water that they were kneeling.
>
> "They had only a few minutes left.
>
> "The doctor alone remained standing. The falling snowflakes spangled him with white tears, making him visible against the darkness, as if he were the speaking statue of the shadows.
>
> "The doctor made the sign of the cross, and raised his voice while he felt, under his feet, the beginning of that almost imperceptible oscillation which announces the instant when a wreck is to plunge. He said:
>
> "'Pater noster qui es in coelis.'
>
> "The Provençal repeated in French:
>
> "'Our Father who art in heaven.' . . .
>
> "'Sicut in coelo, et in terra,' said the doctor.
>
> "No voice answered him.
>
> "He looked down. All the heads were under water. no one had risen. They had let themselves be drowned on their knees.
>
> "The doctor took the flask in his right hand and raised it above his head.
>
> "The wreck was sinking.
>
> "While going down, the doctor was whispering the rest of the prayer.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

> "His chest was above water for a moment, then there was only his arm holding the flask, as if he were showing it to the Infinite.
>
> "That arm disappeared. The deep sea closed smoothly, without a wrinkle, like a tun of oil. The snow was still falling.
>
> "Something remained afloat, and went off with the current into the darkness. It was the tarred flask, supported by its cover."[24]

Enough information has been given to reveal the basic similarities between Ayn Rand's view of what good literature should be and the literature of Victor Hugo to make plain the reasons she likes his work. She likes his style, his sense of life, and his plot-structures. The order form from which the statement about Les Misérables was taken also quotes Ayn Rand. The statement summarizes her attitude toward Victor Hugo. She says that Hugo is a master of one of the most difficult tasks of a novelist, the integration of the abstract theme of a novel with its plot. Also, she sees grandeur as one of the most important aspects of his literary technique.

Though Victor Hugo is Ayn Rand's favorite novelist, strangely enough he did not write her favorite novel. Her favorite novel is a work by two men who are unknown in the literary world. Their novel, Ayn Rand writes, appeared originally in 1901 in The Saturday Evening Post and was forgotten.[25] It was republished by NBI Press in 1967. The

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ayn Rand, "Introduction," in Calumet "K" by Merwin-Webster (New York, 1967), p. i.

novel is Calumet "K." Ayn Rand states that it is not a work of great literature. She says that the style is not remarkable. "Its style is straightforward and competent, but undistinguished."[26] Why is she attracted to it? ". . . it has one element that I have never found in any other novel: the portrait of an efficacious man."[27] She writes:

> The formal hero of this novel is a grain elevator, called "Calumet 'K'," and the novel tells the story of its construction, nothing more. But if you find yourself held in suspense, reading intently, hoping that the structure will be built on time, if you find that two descriptive paragraphs (in the chapter before last) are a gloriously triumphant experience that makes you want to cheer aloud--it will be, like the grain elevator itself, the achievement of Charlie Bannon.[28]

Charlie Bannon is the hero of the novel.

The chapter before last which Ayn Rand refers to is full of the element she describes. This is the chapter in which the elevator is finally completed. At one point Charlie Bannon, exhausted after many long days on the job, walks out to look at the marine leg, a device for getting wheat from a ship on the river into the grain elevator. He meets a carpenter there who has never seen a marine leg before and has come out to take a look. After Bannon

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

explains how the leg works, he realizes that the carpenter seems to be loafing on the job while there is plenty to do and little time to do it in.

Bannon asks, "What are you doing here, anyway? . . . Seems to me this is a pretty easy way to earn thirty cents an hour."[29]

The carpenter replies:

> I don't get my time check till midnight. I ain't on this shift. I just come around to see how things was going. We're going to see you through, Mr. Bannon.[30]

Then occur the two paragraphs that Ayn Rand might have been referring to. After the reader has followed all the trouble Charlie Bannon had to meet and overcome, the reader feels the sense of victory in those paragraphs much more strongly than could the reader of this paper who has never read those lines in context. Note the importance of the events involved.

> Well, the wheat had come down. It had beaten a blizzard, it had churned and wedged and crushed its way through floating ice and the trough of mauling seas; belated passenger trains had waited on lonely sidings while it thundered by, and big rotary ploughs had bitten a way for it across the drifted prairies. Now it was here, and Charlie Bannon was keeping it waiting.
>
> He stood there, looking, only a moment; then before the carpenter's footsteps were well out of hearing, he followed him down the stairway to the belt gallery. Before he had passed half its length

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[29]Merwin-Webster, Calumet "K" (New York, 1967), p. 310.

[30]Ibid.

> you could have seen the difference. In the next two hours every man on the elevator saw him, learned a quicker way to splice a rope or align a shaft, and hear, before the boss went away, some word of commendation that set his hands to working the faster, and made the work seem easy. The work had gone on without interruption for weeks, and never slowly, but there were times when it went with a lilt and laugh; when laborers heaved at a hoisting tackle with a Yo-ho, like privateersmen who have just sighted a sail; when, with all they could do, results came too slowly, and the hours flew too fast. And so it was that Christmas night; Charlie Bannon was back on the job.[31]

After all the equipment has been installed, Bannon goes to the power house and tells the men to start getting "Steam up." After that two paragraphs follow which reveal the joyous excitement that was "in the air" as the elevator was nearing completion.

> There was the accumulated tension of a week of inactivity behind these men, and the effect of Bannon's words was galvanic. Already low fires were burning under the boilers, and now the coal was piled on, the draughts roared, the smoke, thick enough to cut, came billowing out of the tall chimney. Every man in the room, even the wretchedest of the dripping stokers, had his eyes on the steam gauges, but for all that the water boiled, and the indicator needles crept slowly round the dials, and at last the engineer walked over and pulled the whistle cord.
>
> Hitherto they had marked the divisions of time on the job by the shrill note of the little whistle on the hoisting engine boiler, and there was not a man but started at the screaming crescendo of the big siren on top of the power house. Men in the streets, in the straggling boarding houses over across the flats, on the wharves along the river, men who had been forbidden to come to the elevator till they were needed lest they should

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[31] Ibid., pp. 311-312.

> be in the way, had been waiting days for that signal, and they came streaming into the elevator almost before the blast had died away.[32]

The quality that Ayn Rand admires in Calumet "K" is the quality found in these paragraphs. Such a portrayal of "an efficacious man" is rare in literature. It can be found in Ayn Rand's novels and to some degree in the novels of Victor Hugo. This quality was never discussed by Ayn Rand in any of her articles on aesthetics. However, efficacy is one of the important elements of her concept of a hero, so logically it would be an admirable quality for any literary work to have. Calumet "K" makes efficacy the primary element communicated by the story. Ayn Rand writes:

> The essence of the story is Bannon's ingenuity in solving unexpected problems and smashing through sudden obstacles, his self-confident resourcefulness, his inexhaustible energy, his dedication. He is a man who takes nothing for granted, who thinks long-range, who assumes responsibility as a matter of course, as a way of life, knowing that there is no such thing as "luck" and if things are to be done, he has to do them.[33]

Bannon is then a real hero in the Randian use of the term. She says that Bannon is dominated by "a total commitment to

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[32] Ibid., pp. 318-319.

[33] Rand, "Introduction," in Calumet "K," p. ii.

the absolutism of reality."[34] ". . . his basic premise is the primacy of existence . . . ."[35]

The novel reveals many other facts about human existence to Ayn Rand. She says that it captures a mood that has unfortunately been buried with America's past. She writes, "Today, its subtitle ought to be: This was America."[36] She says also that the story reveals the workings of a free economy on a miniature scale.

Even though Bannon is a hero, he is not an ideal. Bannon is a "represser" in any matter not directly a part of his work. The novel has a subplot involving Bannon's relationship with a young woman. Bannon's attitudes are "timidly, evasively mid-Victorian."[37] However, despite the fact that Bannon is not a total hero, the novel does fulfill Ayn Rand's requirement that a work of pure fiction present an ideal. An ideal can be found in the kind of world the novel creates. She says it is "a world in which ability mattered."[38] Later in her introduction she writes: "What is projected predominantly is a quality of innocence and of magnificent health."[39]

In addition to Hugo, Ayn Rand likes another of the novelists of the nineteenth century. Dostoyevsky is admired

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. iii.
[37] Ibid., p. vi.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., p. viii.

for his ability to create dramatic plot-structures. The pamphlet published by Nathaniel Branden Institute lists several of Dostoyevsky's works. The Possessed is described as a "suspense thriller." It is seen as an enormously perceptive and shocking revelation of the psychology behind the nihilism and terrorism of the Russian revolutionary movement in the 19th century. The Brothers Karamozov is seen as a study of the psychology of evil. Crime and Punishment is a classic portrayal of a murderer's mentality. Dostoyevsky does not create heroic events in his novels. There may be some surprise that he is included among Ayn Rand's favorites. He is seen as a Romantic but a Romantic of a peculiar type. The pamphlet refers to him as a "negative Romanticist." It states that embodies three of the basic elements of Romanticism: emphasis on moral conflict, ingenious plot-structure, and integration of theme and action. Ayn Rand makes a similar comment in another place. She writes that she likes Dostoyevsky for his "superb mastery of plot-structure and for his merciless dissection of the psychology of evil."[40] She says that she admires him "even though his philosophy and his sense of life are almost diametrically opposed to mine."[41]

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[40]Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," p. 8.

[41]Ibid.

Ayn Rand first discovered Dostoyevsky at college. Barbara Branden says that her interest in Dostoyevsky was of a "literary and technical nature."[42] Ayn Rand's favorite novel by Dostoyevsky, according to Barbara Branden, was The Possessed because of its plot and its "unmasking" of the revolutionaries.

Approximately the same time Ayn Rand found an interest in Dostoyevsky, she also became interested in Schiller. Barbara Branden says that Ayn Rand admired in Schiller's plays the "combination of wide ideological issues with vivid romantic drama . . . ."[43] She liked the fact that "Schiller's characters are motivated by specific goals or values which they seek to achieve."[44] The plays "dramatize the clash of those values."[45] Ayn Rand also liked the fact that the characters in Schiller's plays seemed to be conscious of philosophical values and directly motivated by them.

In her reading of philosophy Ayn Rand discovered Nietzsche. The first book of his she read was Thus Spake Zarathustra. At first she thought she had found an intellectual ally because Nietzsche seemed to present man as

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[42] Barbara Branden, "A Biographical Essay: Who Is Ayn Rand?" p. 166.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

heroic and seemed to believe in individualism.[46] She was uneasy over the fact that Nietzsche thought the powerful man should seek power over other men instead of over nature. However, after she read The Birth of Tragedy she became disillusioned with Nietzsche because of his denunciation of reason.

Other writers that she and Nathaniel Branden admire may surprise the reader also. They include such fictional writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Scarlet Letter is seen as interesting for its plot. The novel is, according to an order form, the dramatic story of three persons struggling with the problem of guilt and redemption. Edmund Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac is, according to the order form, one of the greatest plays of all time, that possesses two incomparable attributes. These two attributes are an excellently constructed dramatic structure and a powerful portrayal of a moral hero who never surrenders his stainless integrity. Other writers on the list include Henry Sienkiewicz for his Quo Vadis, Noel Coward for his plays, Jack London, Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, and Walter Scott for such novels of heroism as Kenilworth and Ivanhoe. Another writer of interest to Ayn Rand is O. Henry. While Rand was working for Cecil B. de Mille in California, she read O. Henry in her free time for the "cheerfully inexhaustible ingenuity of his plots."[47]

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[46] Ibid., p. 165.

[47] Ibid., p. 176.

She liked the fact that O. Henry did not settle for the obvious but was always able to create a surprise ending that afterwards seemed the logical outcome of the story. She also liked "the light-hearted, benevolent gaiety that was his trademark."[48] Also included on the list mentioned above are Joseph Conrad for his plot-structures and Rudyard Kipling for his fiction and his poems.

Also mentioned on the list is a relatively unknown writer, Baroness Orczy. The novel of hers that is listed is The Scarlet Pimpernel. It is described as a novel with a plot centering around the thrilling adventures of an English aristocrat who, posing as an effete dandy secretly risks his life in a daring battle to rescue victims of the French revolution from the guillotine. The novel involves a wealthy English lord who saves French aristocrats. Not even his wife knows his secret task. Gradually, she discovers what her husband is doing. Due to an unusual situation she also knows that his life is in danger in France because his identity is partially known by the French government. She rushes to France in an attempt to warn her husband. They are captured. Only because of her husband's quick actions and ingenious maneuverings are they able to escape to England again. The novel is similar in many ways to a modern thriller. The story is suspenseful, and the plot moves rapidly, never letting

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[48] Ibid.

interest fall. The Scarlet Pimpernel might be described as a Romantic thriller even though it is set in the past, not in the present. Like James Bond, Sir Percy Blakeney, the hero, must constantly be on guard. The lightning wit and cunning of the hero save him repeatedly from disaster.

Ayn Rand admires some writers, and she dislikes others who do not present qualities in their literary works that are acceptable to her standards. Some of these disliked writers are more popular and more respected than many of the writers Ayn Rand likes. For example, she dislikes Tolstoy. She has written:

> . . . I cannot stand Tolstoy, and reading him was the most boring literary duty I ever had to perform, his philosophy and his sense of life are not merely mistaken, but evil, and yet, from a purely literary viewpoint, on his own terms, I have to evaluate him as a good writer.[49]

At another point she says that Tolstoy "gives me the feeling of an unsanitary backyard which I do not care to enter."[50]

Ayn Rand's opinion of Zola has already been discussed in the context of Zola's contrast to Hugo, but Flaubert has not been mentioned. Earlier Nathaniel Branden was quoted to the effect that he included Flaubert in his use of the term Naturalism, because he could see no fundamental difference between Zola's Naturalism and Flaubert's Realism. Ayn Rand

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[49] Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," p. 8.

[50] Ibid.

says that Flaubert's style is like "the carefully superficial, over-detailed precision of an amoralist."[51]

The criticism by Ayn Rand that that author's style is overly detailed is a criticism she has of most Naturalistic writers. She believes that some of these portraits may have historical or sociological value, but she is not of the opinion that a fictional work with historical and sociological value is necessarily a work with any literary value. Sinclair Lewis is a novelist she often mentions in this context. Nathaniel Branden writes:

> There have been superlatively observant Naturalist writers, such as Sinclair Lewis, who have provided impressively exact portraits of the manners, the speech habits, the practices of a certain type of American in a certain region of the country during a certain period. These portraits may have value as sociological reports, but then they should be identified as such. And if sociological instructiveness is the virtue to be claimed for Naturalism, then it should be recognized that Naturalism--and not Romanticism--deserves the charge of being "didactic."[52]

On the other hand, there are writers whom she cannot praise for their content but whose style she finds to be acceptable. About William Faulkner she writes: "He is a good stylist, but practically unreadable in content."[53] Her opinion of Nabokov is very similar to that of Faulkner. She writes:

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[51] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[52] Branden, "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," p. 102.

[53] Rand, Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand, p. 11.

> I have read only one book of his and a half--the half was Lolita, which I couldn't finish. He is a brilliant stylist, he writes beautifully, but his subjects, his sense of life, his view of man, are so evil that no amount of artistic skill can justify them.[54]

Probably the reader has noticed that most of the novelists Ayn Rand likes were writers of either the nineteenth century or the very early decades of the twentieth century. Most literature before the nineteenth century she dislikes. Greek drama, Shakespeare, and other pre-Romantic literature is believed to be dominated by the fate motif. Literature after the early decades of the twentieth century is largely resented or ignored. All literature that is Naturalistic is disliked to that extent. She dislikes almost all of her contemporaries. On a television show she has attacked Edward Albee in rather heated language. There is, however, one important exception to her general dislike of her contemporaries.

In the discussion of style earlier in this work Ayn Rand was reported to have used two descriptions of New York City to illustrate what she likes as far as style is concerned. She preferred the description of Mickey Spillane over that of Thomas Wolfe. When asked if she liked any modern novelists, she once replied:

> No, there is no one that I could say I admire among the so-called serious writers.

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[54] Ibid.

> I prefer the popular literature of today, which is today's remnant of Romanticism. My favorite is Mickey Spillane.[55]

Why does she like Spillane?

> Because he is primarily a moralist. In a primitive form, the form of a detective novel, he presents the conflict of good and evil, in terms of black and white. He does not present a nasty gray mixture of indistinguishable scoundrels on both sides. He presents an uncompromising conflict. As a writer, he is brilliantly expert at the aspect of literature which I consider most important: plot structure.[56]

In another place she writes:

> . . . I like the early novels of Mickey Spillane, for his plot ingenuity and moralistic style, even though his sense of life clashes with mine, and no explicit philosophical element is involved in his work.[57]

In another context after saying that Hugo gives her the feeling of entering a cathedral, and Dostoyevsky gives her the feeling of entering a chamber of horrors but with a strong guide; she says that Mickey Spillane gives her the feeling of "hearing a military band in a public park."[58]

Ayn Rand first read the novels of Mickey Spillane in 1955.[59] She liked the protagonist of Spillane's novels at

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[55] Ibid. [56] Ibid.

[57] Rand, "Art and Sense of Life," p. 8.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Barbara Branden, "A Biographical Essay: Who Is Ayn Rand?" p. 228.

that time. She liked Mike Hammer because he "is not an exhausted cynic but a moral avenger."[60] She liked Spillane's style also, because it was never "the fashionable, evasive, 'it seems to me,' but the firmly committed 'it is.'"[61]

In 1962 Ayn Rand reviewed one of Spillane's novels for The Objectivist Newsletter. In that article, which had first appeared in the Los Angeles Times on September 2, she writes:

> Mickey Spillane is one of the best writers of our time. He has won an enormous popular following--but no acknowledgment. He stands as a measure of the gulf between the public and its alleged intellectual leaders.
>
> Being the most popular, he has suffered the most vicious injustice on the part of the "intellectuals"--which is a clue to their psychology and to the state of our culture. Like "The Untouchables," like any outstanding exponent of the Romantic school of art, he has been subjected to a sustained campaign of smears, attacks and denunciations--not for flaws, but for his artistic virtues.[62]

Ayn Rand says that Mickey Spillane is attacked because of "sex and violence." The intellectuals believe, according to her, that "sex and violence" are the cause of Spillane's popularity. She says that that is not the real reason why they dislike him. "What they hate him for is the fact that Mickey Spillane is an intransigent moral crusader."[63] She writes:

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ayn Rand, Review of The Girl Hunters by Mickey Spillane, The Objectivist Newsletter, I (October, 1962), 42.

[63] Ibid.

> Detective fiction presents, in simple, primitive essentials the conflict of good and evil; that is the root of its appeal. Mickey Spillane is a moral absolutist. His characterizations are excellent and drawn in black-and-whites; there are no slippery half-tones, no cowardly evasions, no cynicism--and no forgiveness: there are no doubts about the evil of evil.[64]

Although she praises Spillane in this article, she finds some faults with his writings. She says that his sense of life has "a strong element of tragic bitterness."[65] She writes:

> . . . he projects the belief that evil is powerful (a view with which I do not agree), but that man has the capacity to fight it and that no allowances, concessions or compromises are morally conceivable or possible (with which I do agree). His hero, Mike Hammer, is a moral avenger, passionately dedicated to justice, to the defense of the wronged and to the destruction of evil.[66]

Another reason for Mickey Spillane's success is the fact that he is "the true voice of the people in the twentieth century."[67]

> Men everywhere feel trapped by the spread of an uncontested, incomprehensible evil. They have borne so much injustice, seen so many cynically indifferent faces and stored so much frustrated indignation, that the image of Mike Hammer becomes their embodied dream, like an answer to the cry for help they are too inarticulate to utter.[68]

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., pp. 43, 46.

[67] Ibid., p. 46.

[68] Ibid.

As mentioned earlier this article appeared in 1962. That was the year Spillane published The Girl Hunters. Spillane had not published a book with Mike Hammer as the protagonist since 1952. When the story opens Mike Hammer is a drunkard. He has accepted guilt for a disaster that was not really his fault. Ayn Rand believes that the novel does not come up to the standards set by two earlier works with Mike Hammer as the protagonist. She refers to The Long Wait and One Lonely Night. According to the letter mentioned earlier from Nathaniel Branden to the author of this paper, these two novels are still Ayn Rand's favorites by Mickey Spillane.

There is also another factor which leads Ayn Rand to the conclusion that The Girl Hunters is not up to Spillane's earlier standards. She writes:

> It is marred by an oddly inconclusive ending after a brilliantly sustained suspense. The mystery is solved, but the story is not fully consummated dramatically; it seems to demand a sequel--and if this was the author's intention, then he fully succeeded in arousing the reader's interest.[69]

Also, there is another element that Ayn Rand finds not totally admirable. She says that the novel has a more mature atmosphere than Spillane's earlier novels. This is good in one sense because the style is "more polished and more controlled."[70] But:

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

> It is a flaw in respect to a certain stress of bitterness: a faint overconcern with the psychology of hatred, a faint dimming of adventurous enjoyment.[71]

This Ayn Rand disliked because, at the end of the article, she says that "both Mike Hammer and Mickey Spillane should remain timelessly young."[72]

The tone of the article published in 1962 is quite different from the deprecatory comments Ayn Rand published two years later. An article in the 1964 October issue of The Objectivist Newsletter appeared just before the publication of Spillane's Day of the Guns. The article begins:

> Since I have expressed admiration for the work of Mickey Spillane in the past, I must inform our readers regretfully that that estimate does not extend to his forthcoming novel, Day of the Guns. I feel obligated to state for the record that I object emphatically to the political views expressed in this novel, which are shocking and irrationally indefensible.[73]

Ayn Rand objects to the novel's hero "Tiger Mann." She says that he is "a cross between a secret agent and a plain criminal."[74]

> . . . he [Tiger Mann] belongs to a private organization that works for the unofficial help and sanction of some mysterious, unidentified and, apparently, omnipresent government officials--an organization formed to bypass

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ayn Rand, Review of The Day of the Guns by Mickey Spillane, The Objectivist Newsletter, III (October, 1964), 43.

[74] Ibid.

> legality and to fight communist spies by "direct action," which consists predominantly of murder.[75]

Notice here that Ayn Rand condemns Day of the Guns for the same reason she condemned "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." In both good and evil are undefined and indistinguishable. Ayn Rand dislikes remarks she finds in the novel such as: "The bad guys seem to have the edge these days and if you're going to be a bad one, be good and bad."[76]

The characterization lacks any motivation. The writer is irresponsible in his use of important concepts. The novel is, in short, immoral.

> Spillane is obviously not interested in politics. He uses the most awesome questions of our age as a mere backdrop for a rather sordid love story. He never even bothers to tell us what specific goal his hero is pursuing: it has to do with forestalling some communist efforts to damage the "prestige" of the U. N., in connection with some American-British "proposal" which is never revealed to the reader.[77]

In short, the novel is the result of a lack of serious thought about too many issues that are touched on in the novel.

> A fiction writer does not have to be a philosophical thinker. But there is a limit to the degree of non-thinking he can permit himself. Day of the Guns is a sadly eloquent indication of that limit.[78]

The contrast Ayn Rand sees between the earlier and the later novels of Spillane is striking. She says that the

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

"moral fire, passionate dedication to justice" that characterized Mike Hammer stands in sharp contrast to the characterization of Tiger Mann who is "a drab, nasty, embittered cynic."[79] The contrast between hero and villain is gone. Mann is "as sordidly gray as the villains he fights."[80]

Notice that Ayn Rand sees none of these bad characteristics in Spillane's earlier works. She praises his earlier works and makes no qualifications about the characteristics that she dislikes in the later works. Did Spillane suddenly develop these qualities? The characteristics she finds in Day of the Guns are found to a lesser degree in these earlier works, but Ayn Rand completely overlooked them.

For example, the conclusion to I, the Jury is a scene in which Mike Hammer takes justice into his own hands. He goes to the apartment of a murderer. While there he says to himself, as if talking to a friend whom the murderer had killed:

> Remember what I promised you? I'd shoot the killer, Jack [the murdered man], right in the gut where you got it. Right where everyone could see what he had for dinner. Deadly, but he wouldn't die fast. . . .[81] A killer should die that way. Hard, nasty.

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[79] Ibid. [80] Ibid.

[81] Mickey Spillane, I, the Jury (New York, 1964), p. 165.

Mike Hammer could have gone to the police. He did not. If he had been sure who the murderer was, he could have openly presented his evidence in a law court. Instead, he took justice into his own hands. This is not the activity appropriate to a moral crusader who believes in reason. Ayn Rand refers to Mike Hammer as a "moral crusader," a man who acts this way. Such an unqualified stand seems strange coming from a person opposed to capital punishment.[82]

Brutality is one of the characteristics of Mike Hammer, even in the earlier novels. It is true that he is always on the side of the innocent and is primarily concerned with the just. Nevertheless, in the early novels the protagonist gets pleasure out of violence alone above the fact that he is doing the right thing. On one occasion he even admits it to himself:

> I should have felt good. I was dirty as hell but I was still alive. That should make anybody feel good. That is, anybody but me. A gun felt too natural in my hand. I got too much pleasure out of seeing a guy die even if he did deserve to die. /Italics mine./ I was thinking things that no right guy would ever think of. . . .[83]

This sort of attitude is found in more than one or two of the novels. It is a relatively frequently recurring theme.

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[82]See page 3 of the January, 1963 issue of The Objectivist Newsletter for Objectivism's stand on capital punishment.

[83]Mickey Spillane, The Long Wait (New York, 1964), p. 74.

In One Lonely Night, Mike Hammer sees a Communist leader. Hammer says:

> I took a long look at him, making sure that I wouldn't forget his face, because someday he'd be passing a dark alley or forget to lock his door when he went to bed. That is when he'd catch it. And I didn't want to be tagged for it either. That would be like getting the chair for squashing a spider.[84]

In the same novel Mike Hammer beats a naked woman with a belt.[85] The description of that event reads partially as follows:

> I raised the belt and swung it and heard the sharp crack of the leather against her thighs and her scream and that horrible blasting roar all at once.[86]

The girl had been shot from outside through the window. Ayn Rand condemns the statement about being "good and evil" in Day of the Guns, but again, in One Lonely Night there is a remarkably similar statement. The men Hammer kills are villains, but his attitude is still one based, at least partially, on brutality rather than totally on justice, as would be expected from a "moral crusader."

> I lived only to kill the scum and the lice that wanted to kill themselves. I lived to kill so that others could live. I lived to kill because my soul was a hardened thing that reveled in the thought of taking the blood of the bastards who made murder their business. I lived because I could laugh it off and others couldn't. I was

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[84]Mickey Spillane, One Lonely Night (New York, 1964), p. 81.

[85]Ibid., p. 129. [86]Ibid.

> the evil that opposed other evil [Italics mine], leaving the good and the meek in the middle to live and inherit the earth.[87]

In conclusion, there does, as was stated earlier, seem to be a consistent point of view expressed in Ayn Rand's literary judgments. All these novels do have suspenseful plot development in terms of explicitly drawn conflicting forces. The Man Who Laughs, Ninety-Three, Les Miserables, Calumet "K," The Scarlet Pimpernel, and One Lonely Night, all have a quality that is certainly lacking in Germinal, Lolita, or Marty. Despite the fact that Ayn Rand may have overlooked some of the elements in Spillane's early novels that do not agree with her philosophical views, these early novels do have the same emphasis on conflict, crude though it is, that is found in the novels of Victor Hugo. In some, struggle ends in victory. In some, it ends in defeat. However, all present life in terms of conflict.

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[87] Ibid., p. 165.

CHAPTER V

A GENERAL EVALUATION

Ayn Rand's theoretical opinions about aesthetics comprise a consistent approach to literary criticism. Her philosophy, Objectivism, is applicable to all fields of human knowledge as any philosophy must be. However, because she is herself a novelist and, as a result, has strong, well thought-out opinions about fiction writing, she has applied her philosophical ideas to literature in more detail than in other areas of aesthetics. Her aesthetic principles comprise a part of her total system and must be understood in the context of her whole philosophical thought, and in particular in reference to her ethical ideas.

She begins in aesthetics with a descriptive definition of art. She sees it as a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's fundamental value judgments. From this beginning she proceeds to a discussion of the necessity of values in art and in particular in literature. Good art, she concludes, is art that represents good values. Good art gives men standards to look up to and emulate. A person who experiences an art work responds to it on the basis of his personal values just as the artist created it as an

expression of his. The art object is a concrete embodiment of an evaluation of the meaning of life. It sums up all the values and philosophical abstractions of a total world view and presents them to men as a perceptually understandable object.

Ayn Rand believes that the novel is the most important literary form because it represents the most complete embodiment of the principles of art in literature. Because art is, as Aristotle stated, more important than history because it represented what might be and ought to be, the novel is the most important literary form. The novel is a totally ficticious literary genre. It has four elements: plot, style, theme, characterization. Plot is the most important because it most vividly reveals conflict of values. The theme of a novel should be dramatized by the moral conflict of the plot. Furthermore, just as the theme reveals the author's metaphysical values, so the style reveals his epistemological values. The style of a good novel is clear and efficient. Characterization in a good novel reveals real differences of values between the major characters, and their motivation is clear to the reader. A novel may be judged on the basis of its sense of life, that is, on the basis of its estimate of the meaning of human existence. Also, it may be judged from a purely artistic point of view; that means the novel can be judged according to its technical merits. The first way of judging a literary work implies

personal, philosophical values as a criterion. The second type of criticism involves the organization of the plot or the development in the novel's characterization, for example. Ayn Rand's aesthetic point of view is then broad enough to include many valuable ways of approaching a novel. Also, because a novel can be validly judged in these two different ways, a perfectly legitimate value judgment of a novel might be: "It is a good novel, but I don't like it." The first part of this statement is a judgment of a novel's artistic merit; the second part represents a personal judgment about the moral value of the work.

Ayn Rand believes that literature should present an ideal and should be concerned with values; therefore, she admires Romanticism. She sees Romanticism as the literary attitude which gave up the notion of presenting chronicles of real events and attempted to create "pure" fiction. As a result, it was the school of literature dedicated to the portrayal of values. She dislikes Naturalism because it attempts to divorce values from literature. Naturalism claims that fiction should present life "as it is," not "as it might be and ought to be." Naturalism is a return to pre-Romantic concepts in art; that is, it is an art committed to the fate motif.

Ayn Rand's favorite novelist is Victor Hugo. Hugo's novels are characterized by a portrayal of the dramatic, the

important, the essential. His heroes are men of values who struggle to obtain their goals. She likes Calumet "K," a novel by Merwin-Webster, because it presents a portrait of an efficacious man. She likes other writers for the same reasons: they do new and exciting things with their plots so that moral conflict is revealed. She sees modern "thrillers" as one of the last and crudest forms of Romanticism to survive into the twentieth century, but she dislikes the "mock thrillers" because they make fun of the authentic thrillers' heroic qualities. Among modern novelists there is no one whom she really admires, but she likes the early novels of Mickey Spillane because Mike Hammer, their hero, is a moral crusader. She believes that Spillane's early novels are written in terms of blacks and whites.

As stated previously, Ayn Rand presents a consistent approach to literary criticism. However, there are some shortcomings. Her literary theory has been limited in its application to fiction. She has made no critical remarks about poetry, and she has established no way of judging it. In her literary articles there are no tools established by which to judge drama or the prose essay. Of course, her standards have obvious implications for other fields of literature besides the novel, but implications do not comprise a complete aesthetic theory.

Rand's aesthetic theory does, however, have considerable merit. Moral qualities are an important part of literature, either because of their presence in it or because of the notable absence of explicit values in some works. Novels without moral conflict and suspenseful plot development are boring to read as she states. Also, perhaps she is right when she says that literature should reveal rationally acceptable moral qualities and give men a goal to judge their daily actions by. Where else can men find moral ideals projected for them to emulate in our culture? Ayn Rand's ideas do perhaps need to be broadened in scope. Nevertheless, this shortcoming is not inherent in her aesthetic approach. Her aesthetic system is of such a nature that it can be readily expanded to fit types of literature she has not herself considered. As a general appraisal of her aesthetic system, it seems accurate to say that it lacks a degree of breadth perhaps, but it lacks not in depth. There can be no doubt that it faces the theoretical problems involved in contemporary literary criticism and also speaks with vital relevance to modern literary theorizing.

APPENDIX

The Objectivist, Inc.
Empire State Building
350 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10001
(212) 947-1216
June 25, 1968

Mr. Thomas W. Carpenter
1206 McCormick
Denton, Texas 76201

Dear Mr. Carpenter:

I am answering on Miss Rand's behalf your letter of June 10, as her schedule does not permit her the time to answer you herself.

. . . . . .

I cannot answer all of the questions you ask, but we can say the following:

You evidently have read all of Miss Rand's published views on esthetics.

Among Spillane's novels, Miss Rand's two favorites are The Long Wait and One Lonely Night.

The mystery writer for whom Miss Rand expressed admiration on the Carson Show was Donald Hamilton (the Matt Helm series)--chiefly for Hamilton's marvelous plot imagination.

Miss Rand is entirely the originator of her own esthetic views.

The Fountainhead has sold approximately 2½ million copies in all editions; Atlas Shrugged has sold about 2 million copies.

It would not be possible for Miss Rand to read your thesis; she declines such requests as a matter of policy.

Sincerely,

/s/ Nathaniel Branden

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