

“So How Do You Like It Here In Hampshire, Miss Rand?”

The Neoliberal's Jane Austen

Once in a while an essayist has to dig deep and confront flaws in his or her own character no sane human would care to divulge in public. Thus I console myself even as I wince in acknowledging the pleasure I have taken in the novels of Ayn Rand. Especially her masterpiece, *Atlas Shrugged*, a dramatized account of her “objectivist” philosophy that cast its idiot-savant glow across too many hours of my adolescent reading and has remained an embarrassment with me into middle age. As a young man I flirted with Rand’s compulsion to box altruism about the ears with the knobby cudgel of egoism, but love, in sundry guises, soon called me away to saner pursuits. A significant minority of my contemporaries, however—nearly all of them male—seemed to lack immune systems that could recognize and blitz the Rand-virus. Even her critics concede that her contrarian anti-socialism draws a compelling bitterness from her memory of Lenin’s and Stalin’s depredations in her native Ukraine, whence she’d fled as a young girl. On top of this, her urge to flout conventional wisdom and warn her readers of the con being perpetrated on them by *both* the established order *and* a hidden cabal of villains would have sounded a very beguiling note in the ear of any disaffected youth, only amplified by her fantasy of a counter-cabal of illuminati who ultimately restore the reign of reason and free trade and thereby save the world.

But her legacy has an ugly side that involves more than legions of spotty adolescent enthusiasts. In the United States, where she made her home and found her primary audience, Rand’s books inspired the first wave of neoliberal economists and neoconservative activists, whose interventions so changed the American social and political landscapes of the late twentieth century. Alan Greenspan, one of her more prominent disciples, attended many a philosophical soiree at her Manhattan apartment. Rand’s “philosophy” underpins most of the unpicking of Roosevelt’s New Deal policies that has been both the stern task and the dark joy of the post-Reagan neoconservative consensus: the loathing of large-scale government intervention and regulation, the baiting of welfare bludgers, the maenad frenzy to cut corporate taxes and to free “capitalist man” from all constraint. Those more susceptible contemporaries of mine took their infatuation with Rand’s fables into many an American university, think-tank, and young-

Republican hoedown and hootenanny. Some eventually found themselves running the show, in the administrations of presidents both Republican and Democrat. From their conduct of such office as they achieved, a number of fine ironies have ensued.

Rand's *summa economica* is best read as a cartoon or manga-comic. It offers a dystopian future-vision comparable to Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*. We can throw in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, or even Jack London's less well known *The Iron Heel*—any speculation about just how badly things could come unstuck if they carry on as they seem to be unfolding *now*. For the unwary or susceptible reader, such visions pack an uncanny wallop: they establish a parallax between their *tableaux* of future horror and their disturbing relevance to their authors' contemporary scenes. Like Wells' Eloi and Morlocks, the characters in such works represent *us*, dear reader, writ large across a forward abyss of time: who we wish to be, who we fear we might become, all enacted before our eyes with the hypersaturated certainties of a morality play. Heroes and villains wear their characters on their sleeves like "Hi! I'm . . ." name-tags at some corporate-motivation seminar. The truant pleasures of romance or soap-opera join forces with moral rigor: wish-fulfillment and duty exchange flirtations in a guilt-free intellectual junk-food binge. Twinkies and Wagon Wheels served up by a white-gloved Jeeves on a polished tray. One wishes Rand had had the wit to confect her own Wodehouseian Jeeves-and-Bertie vehicle for the better conveying of her concerns, but such subjunctives can occasion only sterile regrets. Her plots, when they proceed, do so with all the bombast and pace of a steam roller working an Olympic ski-jump, a spectacle that offers its own peculiar fascinations. Between interminable speechifyings, both her own and her characters', she can write some bone-shaking action sequences.

These are the pleasures (if not exactly the virtues) of Rand's work. Its blemishes are legion. Her characters exchange position statements rather than plausible conversation. Despite the proto-feminist CV of her railway-magnate protagonist, Dagny Taggart, Rand's gender politics make Hemingway look like a bloomed suffragette.¹ Her "philosophy"² garnishes some of Nietzsche's crankier hissy fits with dumbed-down lashings of Hobbes, Locke, and Adam

¹ There is a kind of vertiginous fun to be had in waiting for how appalling her *next* reflection on relationships between men and women may prove. Of her actual sex-scenes the less said the better.

² Which, you may note, I am so far handling between the latex gloves of scare-quotes. I may shortly stop bothering, but you should be able to imagine their continued presence around any further references I make to Rand's way of thinking.

Smith. Her actual thought is too often drowned out by the screech of all the axes she's grinding at almost every turn.

And *what* axes! Every least whiff of socialist collectivism and liberal sensibility that ever colored the New Deal consensus is tarred, feathered, and made to write "I must not make nice to poor people, whose poverty is entirely their own fault" a thousand times on the blackboards of Patrick Henry University.³ To be fair, it's important to understand the wellsprings of Rand's animosities. These arose against the backdrop of her ancestral Ukraine, where Lenin and Stalin had imposed brutal forced collectivization and anti-kulak campaigns. The region's distinct ethnic and geographic identity offended Soviet internationalism, and its traditions of small-scale private agriculture disposed much of its population to oppose Soviet efforts to collectivize and industrialize its economy. Soviet authority responded savagely, with policies of forced collectivization that mutated into mass appropriations of harvests, enforced with draconian legislation, that amounted to genocide. Millions died in famines engineered by Kremlin authorities to subdue what they saw as backward, counterrevolutionary populations, all in the name of a greater social good. The evidence of a mere handful of unauthorized grain could dispatch the offender to execution or the gulag, under authorities claiming sanctimoniously to be acting for the good of all. This nightmare scenario shapes Rand's apocalypse of an America similarly prostrated by the scheming hypocrisy of social engineers, bogus intellectuals, and outright thugs masquerading as altruists. This is what lends such compelling power to her otherwise wobbly philosophy. Her anti-socialist soap-opera enthralled minds and imaginations at the high-tide of McCarthy-era anti-communist fretfulness in America. She hero-worshipped her adopted country on the rebound from Stalinist atrocity. Despite the central role of fact and reason in her philosophy, her enthusiastic embrace of American anti-communism led her to ignore its know-nothing thuggery under McCarthy and J. Edgar Hoover.

Her song particularly seduced those conservatives who fulminated against FDR as though he'd turned Washington into a low-cost bed and breakfast for the KGB. Even responsible dissent from the New Deal could quickly take on a hysterical anti-communist tone. It is no

³ The inspiringly named *alma mater* of her square-jawed heroes, all of whom, in the University's heyday, were taught by its one true-blue philosophy professor, since cast off and exiled by the hacks and lackeys of the new socialist order and reduced to slinging the best damned burgers in fifty counties from a roadside diner in Colorado (Rand's heroes are always the best damned hands at anything they turn their damned hands to). Beats drinking hemlock daiquiris, that's for sure.

surprise that, in these quarters of American political and intellectual life, many sympathized with Rand's own loathing of all things collective and socialist. As the sixties' carnival of countercultures whooped and love-fested itself into high gear, Rand's conservative economic screed gained fellow travelers among moral and cultural conservatives outraged by all the sex, drugs and rock and roll being flaunted by the nation's youth at Woodstock and other big, messy outdoor venues. A great many of these conservatives were outriders of the evangelical Christian right that would come to dominate U.S. politics for the next forty years, from whose religious piety Rand herself would have shrunk as from a species of cargo-cult atavism. Yet it grew common for the Rand-inspired economic right in America to spout revival-tent rhetoric that, in Rand's novels, would be ranted by only her most scurrilous villains.

Rand at least possessed the courage of her convictions, for better or worse. But she has suffered the fate of many would-be messiahs: her disciples have gone on to make a hash of her teachings, and it is in this hash that some of the more delicious ironies of the mess can be savored. In Rand's black-and-white moral vision, capitalist hero and socialist villain speak mutually unintelligible dialects. Yet when we look at the behavior of many corporations, business leaders and politicians of the post-Reagan neoconservative consensus, they tend to embody the values of Rand's craven villains far more than the perpendicular virtues of her Emersonically self-reliant heroes. Let me take you on a tour of some passages from *Atlas Shrugged* that, in the light of real-world events across the half-century since the book's publication, now sound deliriously back-to-front.

The central conceit of *Atlas Shrugged*, and the idea behind its title, is the dissent of productive intellects from a culture that denies their worth while devouring the fruit of their labors. These Atlases, whose hard graft and smarts uphold a world that does nothing but beat up on them, refuse to bear its weight any longer. Their "shrug" is a gesture both of rebellion and of contempt. Rand likes to think big, in very material media and contexts, so her biggest heroes and recusants are captains of industry: Dagny Taggart, part-owner and chief operator of Taggart Transcontinental; Hank Rearden, inventor and steel manufacturer; Francisco D'Ancónia, aristocratic Argentine copper supremo; and, last but by no means least, John Galt, the book's visionary lynchpin and composite of Francis Bacon, Galileo, Isaac Newton, Thomas Edison, and

Henry Ford. Oh, did I mention Moses, Isaiah and Jesus Christ? I said Rand likes to think big, and they don't come, in her imagination, any bigger than John Galt. Absent from the book's first half, he nonetheless broods mysteriously over it, introduced in a trendy catch-phrase, "Who is John Galt?" on everyone's lips as a comment on the sorry state of the world, whose engines of prosperity and progress stand in dire need of a tune-up and lube-job. It's a purely rhetorical question: everyone assumes the name is a nonce-construction and the man it names an urban legend. Everyone's got an apocryphal tale to tell about him. For Rand, the name "John Galt" is tantamount to the name of God, and *that* question a despairing blasphemy. Even her villains cringe at almost every instance of its use. "Don't *say* that!" they whinge whenever they hear it. "Why does *everybody* say that?" Rather like demons in hagiographical narratives that flinch at the name of God's son. But, midway through *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand reveals that John Galt is a flesh-and-blood *wunderkind* with screwdriver and slide-rule. Years before, as a young auto-industry worker, he'd invented (in his spare time, natch) a revolutionary motor that would have put limitless power into the hands of a culture he perceived as corrupt to the core. Rather than so serve it, he smashed his prototype and disappeared, leaving only that interrogative catch-phrase for a memorial.

Eerily like the Bolsheviks for whom Rand spits implicit contempt on almost every page, Galt conspires in secret to hasten the decline of the world he's rejected. Turns out he's got a bit of the Scarlet Pimpernel in him, too.⁴ The world he's left behind is running down for two reasons. First, through the incompetence and hypocrisy of the legions of no-hopers its warped ideology has elevated to nearly all the positions of power. And, second, because its remaining talents are being filched: from a secret capitalist redoubt Galt has established in a valley of the Rocky Mountains, he's been covertly recruiting the best and the brightest lights still doing it tough out there in the gathering gloom. One by one they've been disappearing, without explanation or visible motive, leaving the rest to soldier on till, one by one, they in turn get the mystery tap on the shoulder as well. Dagny and Hank Rearden are left practically the only islands of competence left to confront a still-rising tide of lunacy. Until Dagny learns that, yes, there really *is* a John Galt and that he's been recruiting the last people in the world who know

⁴ Hmm, another kind of "red"—Rand is really looking ripe for some good old Derridean deconstruction . . . another day, perhaps.

how to get anything done to go on strike and join him in his free-market, gold-standard Shangri-La.

Meanwhile, the outside world goes obligingly to wrack and ruin as the American equivalents of Soviet *apparatchiks* and *nomenklatura* botch and mismanage every steel mill, auto-factory, train-service, bridge and electric tea-kettle in sight. Half the wicked fun of Rand's story arises from simply watching her trash the joint. The glory of American know-how and industrial gigantism disintegrates before the reader's eyes, to the tune of Rand's unforgiving objectivist philosophy, which denounces all social conscience as diseased codswallop that renders its partisans such hopeless thickos that only complete and utter disaster can attend their every decision. She can thus enjoy the double pleasure both of saying "I told you so" on a grand scale and of indulging in an almost crypto-terrorist orgy of destruction for the pure fun of it.

She sketches somber vistas of decline, industrial wastelands where every window pane is smashed and every cracked pavement sprouts weeds, among which the bewildered unemployed huddle like refugees:

There was a strong wind and a gray light squeezed from among the clouds. In that light, he saw the brown-red rust, like dead blood, on the steel of the giant cranes—and bright, green, living weeds, like gorged cannibals, growing over piles of broken glass at the foot of walls made of empty frames. At a gate in the distance, he saw the black silhouettes of men. They were the unemployed from the rotting hovels of what had been a prosperous town. (p. 51)⁵

They reached the factory of the Twentieth Century Motor Company two miles and two hours later. They knew, as they climbed the hill, that their quest was useless. A rusted padlock hung on the door of the main entrance, but the huge windows were shattered and the place was open to anyone, to the woodchucks, the rabbits and the dried leaves that lay in drifts inside.

The factory had been gutted long ago. The great pieces of machinery had been removed by some civilized means—the neat holes of their bases still remained in the

⁵ *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Dutton, 1992 [1957]). This and all subsequent quotations are taken from this anniversary edition.

concrete of the floor. The rest had gone to random looters. There was nothing left, except piles of twisted, rusted scraps, of boards, plaster and glass splinters—and the steel stairways, built to last and lasting, rising in trim spirals to the roof. (pp. 286-287)

Published in 1957, Rand's descriptions of these forlorn scenes read like prophecies of the urban and suburban dry-rot that set in as the American auto-industry began to falter in the 1990's and after. Rand's doctrine posits such decline as the necessary consequence of government meddling: of the imposition of stupid social policies and regulations on industries that, if left to go their way, would have produced untold wealth for all in season. Instead, drones incapable of inventing the toothpick have got their legislative and regulatory fingers into all those worthy industrialists' pies, to plunder the honest surplus of their honest endeavors. Rand's lantern-jawed, Gary-Cooper-cutout⁶ he-men (and, in Dagny Taggart, her one he-woman) of oil field, mine, mill and rail are all so many noble stags being brought low and torn to pieces by the hounds of self-serving legislators and social engineers, their stratagems informed and abetted by dishonest leftie academics and sleazy journalists and poetasters. This is all highly entertaining fiction, but in real life, as it happened, it was Henry Ford's legatees in Detroit who, in a climate of *laissez-faire* deregulation and corporate tax-cutting, mismanaged and blundered their way into financial straits from which they then looked to the government and the taxpayer to bail them out (a mortal sin in Rand's catechism). Ken Lay of Enron infamy was exactly the kind of debt-juggler and paper-asset-pusher that Rand despised, yet he and his kind were, in their time, enthusiastically serviced, and even celebrated, by legislators and think-tankers who trumpeted their allegiance to the driest of liberal economic principles, often with reference to Rand's works and teachings. Clearly, they could not have read them as closely as one might wish. Lay's programs of "rolling blackouts" in California looked like out-takes from scenes of similar disruption in *Atlas Shrugged* that are engineered by Rand's socialist creeps, not by her sturdy capitalist saints.

Dagny Taggart has a brother, James, with whom she owns and runs Taggart Transcontinental. But James Taggart possesses the charms and competence of a psychotically indulged chihuahua. To say he snivels is like saying Niagara Falls trickles. Dagny, of course,

⁶ Tellingly, Gary Cooper actually played Rand's equally, well, Gary-Cooper-like architect-hero Howard Roark in a film version of *Atlas Shrugged*'s slightly leaner predecessor, *The Fountainhead*.

does all the heavy lifting in the running of their railroad, and scarce thanks she gets for it too. James' talents lie elsewhere:

They talked about his [James'] gift of "making railroads prosper," his "good press," his "Washington ability." He seemed unusually skillful at obtaining favors from the legislature. (p. 52)

Sniveling James Taggart is what we would now call a lobbyist. Instead of mucking in like his sister to get his hands dirty making the trains run on time and more frequently, he prefers to angle for handouts and favors from friends in government. Rand clearly sees James' way as both corrupt and unmanly. This caricature plays curiously, though, against the fact that most major corporations and their officers, in the decades since *Atlas Shrugged* was published, have worked the corridors of legislative and regulatory power far more frequently than they have hit the drawing boards with their design-teams. How many more bail-out packages need organizing before your average neoliberal economist can bring himself to concede that most of our corporate suits are behaving far more like Rand's creepy spongers and moochers than like her rugged individualist heroes? James Taggart may out-whinge the lot, but his values are not all that different. Rand was holding her undeniable gift of prophecy the wrong way 'round all the while.

In one early crisis, Dagny constructs a desperately needed rail-line that succeeds, against all counsel and odds. She even names it the "John Galt Line" in cheeky defiance of the prevailing helpless mood. Her enemies have most of the press in their pockets: the newspapers print little beyond dreary predictions of the line's failure; they pour scorn on the new bridge design that exploits the enhanced structural properties of Hank Rearden's new steel:

No space was given by the newspapers to the progress of the construction of the John Galt Line. No reporter was sent to look at the scene. The general policy of the press had been stated by a famous editor five years ago: "There are no objective facts," he has said. "Every report on facts is only someone's opinion. It is, therefore, useless to write about facts." (p. 850)

Reading this for the first time since the presidency of George W. Bush, I was just about knocked off my chair by the close analogy between Rand's new-speak editor's cavalier attitude toward mere "facts" and the now-infamous exchange reported by *The New York Times*' Ron Suskind with a "senior Bush aide" in 2002, as that administration was beating the drums of war for an invasion of Iraq:

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."⁷

Juggle the terms "facts" and "reality" between these two passages, and Rand's dishonest, left-leaning *fictional* journalist sounds an uncanny forward echo of a senior aide in a *real-life* right-wing administration that could easily claim to enjoy Rand's imprimatur on the economic front—Bush's record on corporate tax-cuts and deregulation are exemplary Rand-isms—and yet here one of its spokespersons is cheerfully *boasting* of what Rand could only condemn as intellectual dereliction: a denial that in an individual might be pathological. Her "objectivist" philosophy demands a rigorous regard for *objective* fact, without which we are doomed to spiral down into wish-fulfilment and delusion. Yet once again we see the standard-bearers of the right behaving more like Rand's louche-leftie scoundrels than like her straight-arrow, tell-it-like-it-is heroes.

Rand's heroes, above all else, constitute formidable specimens of Rand's favorite species, *homo faber*, man the maker,⁸ whose defining faculty is his ability to manipulate his material environment for his benefit. Her heroes are all inventors and innovators as well as astute

⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html?_r=0

⁸ Given Rand's retro gender-sensibilities, there seems little point in making consistent use of gender-neutral language while discussing her ideas.

managers: Galt invents a new source of motive power; D'Ancónia is a fountain of innovative mining techniques; Hank Rearden whips up an impossibly tensile, strong and light new form of steel. All are driven by a daemonic passion for pushing against boundaries and limitations. In this they resemble Renaissance swashbucklers and restless intellects like Drake, Raleigh and Francis Bacon, far more than relatively cautious Enlightenment rationalists such as Hume and Locke, to whose ideas Rand pays regular homage. Though her philosophy enthrones a wholly material rationalism in its tallest party-chair, Rand remains a breathless romantic to the core. Her male heart-throbs could serve as Mills & Boone hunks for a good few dozens of pages, at least until their superior intellects gave them away. They know how to look after themselves and their dreams; what Rand cannot forgive her scoundrels is their spineless parasitism: they flee their own impotence by gorging on the *real* men's productivity. In this exchange between Dagny and a town clerk whom she's interrogating about a failed factory, Rand sums up the moochers' *modus operandi*:

“Did Mark Yonts operate the factory before he sold it?”

“Lord no, ma'm! He wasn't the kind that ever operates anything. He didn't want to *make* money, only to *get* it.” (p. 293)

Mark Yonts plays his bit-part as a tawdry asset-stripper—the sort of non-productive resource-sucker that Rand loathes. Yet how much of the economic activity of her disciples' boom years of the 80's and 90's, when Jurassic pods of Gordon Gekkos stalked the land, was precisely this kind of sterile asset-shuffling that neither innovates nor produces but merely consumes? What, in heaven's name, could she possibly have made of the derivatives markets that later partied the global economy into a recession it's still recovering from? Of top-feeder so-called businessmen making their money by playing a high-stakes variant of pass-the-parcel with nothing more than packages of bad debts? To Rand that would look only slightly more attractive than necrophilia. Some of those modern swashbucklers of high finance swashed their buckles with funds they raided from employee pension-funds; once again, Rand got there first. In this passage, the mayor of a failing rust-belt city gives Dagny a lesson in late-twentieth-century economics, nearly half a century ahead of time:

“See that woman, for instance [a cleaning lady in his office]? They used to be solid, respectable folks. Her husband owned a dry-goods store. He worked all his life to provide for her in old age, and he did, too, by the time he died—only the money was in the Community National Bank.” (p.296)

The Community National Bank, it turns out, played silly-buggers with its depositors’ money. Its head, Eugene Lawson, grandstanded as “the banker with a heart” who’d give a loan to any bad risk in order to curry favor with the bleeding hearts of influential of social and political cliques. Once again, Rand has nailed the essence of what was to go so horribly wrong in investment banking fifty years later, but she’s imagined its *cause* back-to-front, since real people lost their real retirement funds not through soft-headed do-gooder lending to needy spendthrifts but in Vegas-style compulsive-gambling binges by profit-crazed execs given carte-blanche by Bush-era banking deregulation, many of whom awarded themselves obscene bonuses even after the institutions they headed had haemorrhaged unconscionable amounts of other people’s money. That deregulation was enacted in the name of empowering capital to do its Randian best in an entirely free market. The results proved anti-Randian beyond the reach of even her tetchy pessimism. Oh, and Eugene Lawson? Check out *his* subsequent move up in the world:

“Where is Eugene Lawson?”

“Oh, him? He’s done all right. He’s got a job in Washington—in the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources.” (p. 296)

Do I really need to point to all the former Bechtel and Haliburton executives in George Bush’s administration to cement further Rand’s already formidable credentials as a prophet? Not really, except to indicate, yet again, the same irony: the malfeasance Rand attributes, with shrill doggedness, to pompous and corrupt non-entities of the *left* in her novel has been taken up and wickedly improved upon by her own ideological grandchildren. Poor Nana Ayn must be positively *spewing* in that great beyond she refused to believe in.

She has even anticipated the rise of the broadcast shock-jock, with, once again, eerie prescience:

Bertram Scudder seemed to be afraid of her [Dagny Taggart]. He clung to the microphone, spitting words into its delicate mesh, into the ears of the country, introducing the subject of his program. He was laboring to sound cynical, skeptical, superior and hysterical together, to sound like a man who sneers at the vanity of all human beliefs and thereby demands an instantaneous belief from his listeners. (p. 850)

Scudder plays the willing tool and media propagandist of the new-world-order social-*fascisti* arrivistes in *Atlas Shrugged*. His anti-intellectual bullyboy rants are pure Fox News “balance.” If Rupert Murdoch had thrown his lot in with socialist reform rather than neoliberal reaction, a horde of Scudder-clones would now be haranguing us down their studio cameras and microphones, instead of Rush Limbaugh and Bill Reilly. Different message, but the song remains the same.

My last quotation from *Atlas Shrugged* anticipates another moment of breathtaking *chutzpah* from Rand’s less than wholly clued-up intellectual inheritors, as they wrestled with the 2007 collapse of world credit markets. Here James Taggart is trying to explain to his sister why, in her absence, he had to go along with yet another vile piece of socialist legislation that gave Taggart Transcontinental some unfair advantage over its competitors:

“We couldn’t permit a railroad like Taggart Transcontinental to crash! It would have been a national catastrophe! We had to think of all the cities and industries and shippers and passengers and employees and stockholders whose lives depend on us! It wasn’t just for ourselves, it was for the public welfare!” (p. 843)

All together now, folks: can you say “too big to fail”? Who *wasn’t* saying this of Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley after the Lehman Brothers’ greased-skid woopsie into bankruptcy? By so wilfully denying the very possibility of yet another investment bank’s insolvency—while the objective reality of it was staring them in the face—various politicians and public

commentators rationalized the massive bail-out loans needed to keep those two afloat. Millions lose their homes, millions more their retirement funds, but a vanishingly small minority of bankers and brokers simply could not be allowed to lose bonuses that have to be calculated using scientific notation. Capitalism for the masses, socialism for the bosses, as many have since ruefully observed. And Ayn Rand, like Eliot's Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, foresaw and foresuffered the lot (well, at least her characters did the suffering bit). But nearly all the impossible fantasies of her last and biggest novel anticipate with truly startling accuracy and precision the follies of those politicians and businessmen who were, incredibly, most indebted to the lessons she sought to teach America in the fifties. Rarely has a po-faced Zen master been at once so celebrated and so utterly contradicted by her own swarming Grasshoppers. To return to my title, it's rather as if someone had written a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice* in which Elizabeth Bennett and Mr D'Arcy migrate to America, steal a Model T Ford and set off on a murderous spree of bank-heists across the Depression-era midwest: you'd still be following Austen's characters, sort of, but entirely inside-out and back-to front. Rarely in history can the purveyor of an ideology as strident as Ayn Rand's have been so poorly served by the graduates of her academy. I'd like to say it restores my battered faith in the quirky genius of human nature, which will never sit still to be lectured at by anybody for very long, were it not for the untold harm wrought by all those free-marketeers, many of them clutching dog-eared copies of *Atlas Shrugged* like cultural revolutionaries brandishing Mao's little red book. Like most pietists, they won't hear a single criticism of their scripture, but neither do they actually *read* it very often or closely. Would the history of the neoliberal cultural revolution of the latter twentieth century have turned out any happier if its hoplites had *really* read their Rand? Who is John Galt?