

Books

Ayn Rand in the Scholarly Literature II

Rand, Rush, and Rock

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In the Fall 2001 issue of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, we initiated a series entitled "Ayn Rand in the Scholarly Literature," wherein we sought to highlight attention paid to Rand in the works of contemporary scholars and intellectuals (Johnson and Sciabarra 2001). The central purpose of the series is not textual—or in the current context, lyrical—exegesis; it is simply to survey discussions in the literature that might lead Rand scholars toward hitherto untapped and potentially fruitful areas of research.¹

Though studies of Rand are published with increasing regularity, there has been no attention given to her presence in the scholarly literature on Progressive rock music—that virtuoso "art" style noted for its experimental blending of rock, classical, jazz, and other idioms. References to Rand usually specify her connection to the Canadian Progressive rock band Rush and its lyricist and drummer, Neil Peart, whose Randian pedigree shows up in many of his compositions. This link has been noted by writers such as Barbara Branden (1986, 419) and Jeff Walker (1999, 127), but what has gone unnoticed is the extent to which scholars have grappled with Rand's broader influence.

In this essay, I concentrate on five books—in the ever-growing literature on Progressive rock—which note that influence to varying degrees: Edward Macan's *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (1997); Paul Stump's *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock* (1997); Carol Selby Price and Robert M. Price's *Mystic Rhythms: The Philosophical Vision of Rush* (1998);² Bill

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Martin's *Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock, 1968–1978* (1998); and Kevin Holm-Hudson's edited collection, *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* (2001), which features an important essay on Rush by Durrell S. Bowman. These five books present diverse portraits of Ayn Rand and her cultural impact.

Apollo and Dionysus

As a musicologist, Macan (1997) begins his study on the premise that “no music exists outside of society,” since it is a creature “of a specific time and place” (viii). But he also recognizes that the meaning of music emerges from a hermeneutic “combination of internal factors present in the text itself and external factors brought into play by the context in which the text is mediated” (9). Everything about Progressive rock, says Macan, was “inextricably intertwined to convey a coherent artistic vision,” a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which “encapsulates countercultural ideology.” The “hippies,” who were initially attracted to this music, protested the “soulless bureaucracy which [they] believed [was] crushing every trace of spiritual life out of Western culture” (11). Progressive rock's countercultural utopian vision encompassed mythological, mystical, and science-fiction imagery drawn from various sources, including J. G. Bennett (a disciple of the Russian mystic-esoteric philosopher G. I. Gurdjieff), visionary film director Stanley Kubrick (especially his *2001: A Space Odyssey*),³ *Siddhartha* novelist and poet Herman Hesse, *Lord of the Rings* fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien, and science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein.⁴

Macan argues that Progressive rock drew much from the European classical tradition, including its tone colors, symphonic structure, and its emphasis on “instrumental virtuosity.” But its distinctive style was an outgrowth of “a dialectical relationship” between the “high culture” of classical music and popular “African-American musical forms” (including blues and jazz) (13).

In a detailed analysis of several Progressive rock pieces from bands as diverse as Yes, Genesis, and Pink Floyd, Macan examines Emerson, Lake, and Palmer's album, *Tarkus*. Macan focuses on the

iconography of a composition called “Manticore,” particularly the piece's fifth movement. The Manticore—“a mythological beast with the head of a man, body of a lion, and tail of a scorpion”—appears on the cover art (88). For Macan, the Manticore “seems to symbolize the ‘natural’ or ‘spiritually authentic’ man or woman—unencumbered by materialism, un beholden to technology, unafraid of Big Brother” (90). Because of the composition's preoccupation with authenticity, Macan notes: “I am reminded of John Galt, the protagonist of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, whom this description might also be said to fit, although I have never heard Emerson, Lake, or Palmer mention any acquaintance with Rand's novels” (257 n. 6).⁵

Macan's comparison of ELP's Manticore and John Galt suggests an awareness of the similarity embodied in their spiritual quests, even if their underlying ideology diverges dramatically.⁶ The use of iconic images in countercultural Progressive rock compositions is not unusual. As Macan puts it, this was music on a “heroic scale,” depicting “epic conflicts” that “engaged its listeners in a quest for spiritual authenticity[.] . . . encapsulat[ing] an optimism, a confidence, and perhaps even an innocence that is a refreshing antidote to the cynicism and pessimism of more recent times” (222).

One key to the divergence in ideology between Rand and most “countercultural” Progressive rockers might be found in their respective uses of Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes. Rand herself appropriated these archetypes from the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. As Rand (1975a, 57–58) puts it:

In *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, Nietzsche claims that he observed two opposite elements in Greek tragedies, which he saw as metaphysical principles inherent in the nature of reality; he named them after two Greek gods: Apollo, the god of light, and Dionysus, the god of wine. Apollo, in Nietzsche's metaphysics, is the symbol of beauty, order, wisdom, efficacy (though Nietzsche equivocates about this last)—i.e., the symbol of reason. Dionysus is the symbol of drunkenness . . . wild, primeval feelings, orgiastic joy, the dark, the savage, the unintelligible element in man—i.e., the

symbol of emotion.

Rand did not accept either Nietzsche's "estimate" of the "respective values" of Apollo and Dionysus or his presumption that reason and emotion are necessarily in conflict. But she believed that "Nietzsche's symbols" could help us "to integrate and bear in mind the essential meaning of complex issues." For Rand, "Apollo and Dionysus represent the fundamental conflict of our age," concretized in reality by two 1969 events: the scientific triumph of the Apollo 11 moon landing versus the 'emotionalism' on display at the Woodstock rock music festival (58-59).

Whereas Rand dichotomizes reason and rock, Macan (1997, 83) recognizes this same Apollonian-Dionysian conflict at work *within* contemporary rock music. He writes:

There was always an implicit tension in the counterculture between the alleged goals of drug use and free love (opening new portals of consciousness and renouncing the possessiveness of materialistic society, respectively) and the pursuit of these activities as ends in themselves. With the dissolution of psychedelia around 1970, one sees the emergence of what might be called Apollonian and Dionysian responses to this paradox in the two primary subgenres to emerge from the ashes of psychedelia, progressive rock and heavy metal. (83)

Interestingly, just as Rand embraced the Apollonian, Progressive rock itself, says Macan, "represents the Apollonian side of the counterculture: the emphasis on the spiritual quest, the critiques of contemporary society, the fascination with sophisticated narratives" (83). By contrast, the heavy metal components in contemporary rock music embraced the Dionysian aspects of the counterculture, says Macan, its hedonism and promiscuity as ends in themselves.⁷

This archetypal distinction was also used by Rush lyricist Neil Peart, in his composition "Hemispheres." As Carol Selby Price and Robert M. Price explain, "Hemispheres" is an allegory about human nature and the creation myth:

The story recounts successive, rival efforts of the gods Apollo and Dionysus to provide guidance for the fledgling human race. Each offers his own brand of wisdom, Apollo that of efficient, calculating reason, Dionysus that of instinctual, chaotic ecstasy. Each has its advantages, but each leaves dangerous blind spots, as well as needs unmet.

At length, with the world torn in half, into hollow hemispheres, a balance is struck. It is decided that both wisdoms are needed, each being quite indispensable, and the crucial thing is to know when which ought to come into play. (Price and Price 1998, 138)

In the song, these age-old "literary and philosophical symbols" engage in a struggle that takes place within the "individual human psyche," in which "every soul is a battlefield." The ultimate goal in Peart's vision is a synthesis of the left (logical, analytical) and right (creative, emotional) "hemispheres" of the brain, however: "Each spirit was split into hollow hemispheres but at length reconciled, heart and mind united in a single perfect sphere" (138).⁸

Jeff Walker (1999, 127) has noted that Peart, "a strong admirer of Rand," rejected what he perceived as Rand's own "dichotomization" of Apollo and Dionysus.⁹ Peart admitted to being excited by *both* the moon landing *and* the Woodstock festival. Ever-willing to challenge conventional boundaries, even the boundaries constructed by his philosophical mother, Peart saw "no division" between these events. Equally opposed to religion and to any kind of stark "rationalism" that might "squeeze out the human spirit," Peart heralds "the dawn of a new perspective which transcends both brain hemispheres of logic and instinct and fuses them into some higher synthesis" (Price and Price 1998, 141). Embodying the "essence of Romanticism," Peart projects a dialectical integration of reason with insight, science with art.

Rush: Beyond Liberal and Conservative

Rush has long been the favorite band of a hard-core group of devoted followers, not unlike the kind of subculture surrounding Rand herself.¹⁰ The Prices' *Mystic Rhythms* explores the thematic content of Peart's lyrics, imbued, as they are, with "infectious optimism" (7). Though his lyrics invite comparison to the words of Plato, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Colin Wilson, it is Rand, say the authors, who is Peart's major influence.¹¹ In compositions such as "Red Alert," "The Big Money," "The Weapon," and "Red Barchetta," Peart engages in a Randian repudiation of the herd mentality and social conformity and an "exaltation of the individual" —which the authors identify as "the fundamental assumption of political conservatism" and its "distaste for Big Government." He celebrates the human body and its beauty, the human mind and its promise and projects an ideal man, not unlike Rand's Howard Roark or John Galt. The rebellious "New World Man" is "self-formation" and "self-actualization" personified, at war with social constructions of the individual. New World Man is a manifestation of the "conservative" vision "of a society composed of many individuals and taking its shape, flavor, and character *from them*" (77).

But the fact that Peart is equally at odds with established religion suggests that the authors' description of his politics as "conservative" is woefully inadequate. Durrell S. Bowman argues, by contrast, that Rand's revolt against Judeo-Christian morality and related notions of community and tradition place her outside contemporary conservatism. Indeed, as Bowman observes, to call Rand "'deeply conservative' necessarily posits a revisionist reading of what it means to be conservative." Rand, says Bowman, was an exemplary representative of "nineteenth-century romantic social liberalism," with its emphasis on "free trade along with individual rights and freedoms" (Bowman 2001, 192).¹² Bowman suggests that labeling Rand is problematic only in the context of a twentieth-century transformation in the meaning of "liberalism" and "conservatism" due to the rise of the welfare state. He writes: "By the mid-1980s the transition was complete, and anyone who favored individualism, laissez-faire

capitalism, and smaller government (or at least a lesser amount of government interference in the lives of individuals) was considered 'conservative.'" This label stuck even if the person abhorred censorship or favored reproductive rights or the rights of gays and lesbians to pursue their own happiness. It is for this reason that Peart came to describe himself as politically "libertarian" in opposition to both left-wing intolerance of the "politically-correct" sort and the right-wing intolerance of religious fundamentalists who sought to crush free expression and alternative lifestyles (193).

Peart's disgust with ignorance, prejudice and zealotry is on display in a trilogy of songs ("Witch Hunt," "The Weapon," and "The Enemy Within"), which deal with the theme of "Fear." In this trilogy, Peart articulates a successive cognitive movement toward understanding the essence of that emotion. As Price and Price (1998, 15) explain, Peart shows "how evil lies beneath the surface of pious intentions, obvious to everyone but the self-deceived mob itself." The "picture of religion" presented in this trilogy

recalls Nietzsche's condemnation of Christianity as a "slave morality," the creed of the cringing cowardly herd, for whom "faith" can be defined as not wanting to know the truth, whose real fear is the fear of their own freedom, and whose greatest joy, masochistic though it be, is to "lay down the burden" of their *freedom* "down by the riverside." (18)

The requirement to get to the root of human emotions, such as fear, echoes the Randian injunction to "check one's premises." It highlights a necessity for the individual's "systematic demolition of every evasion of self-motivated action." Thus, in songs such as "Something for Nothing," the authors maintain, Peart projects the "liberty of the soul" as an individual's triumph over an "unreconstructed slave-mentality." The "challenges of freedom" are not merely political; they are deeply psychological (82–83). Peart's lyrics seek "to free the individual from the cloying, numbing, dulling grip of a conformist, mediocrity-society." Rush's "New World Man," the authors argue, aims "to start over, building a better society from the

ground up, using self-assured individualists as the building blocks" (78).¹³

Based on the Price's own descriptions, Peart does not seem to exhibit the typical conscience of a conservative; he seems much more radical and revolutionary in his convictions. The authors themselves emphasize that radicalism especially in their discussion of *2112*, a series of symbolic musical compositions centering on the need for individual integrity to triumph over "the tide of mediocrity" (93). The key to understanding the piece, the authors argue, is its "acknowledgment to the genius of Ayn Rand." Price and Price observe that Rand, "an expatriate Russian philosopher-novelist," had "extolled the value of the creative, autonomous individual over against the stifling, leveling power of the mediocre 'collectivity'" (93-94). Rand's rejection of the Soviet experiment was equally a warning to "every society where collectivism reared its head, under whatever name" (95).

Rush's protest against "enforced mediocrity" (135) and social conformity is also the subject of such songs as "Mission" and "Red Barchetta." Fully embracing Rand's anti-egalitarianism, Rush portrays the "nonsense" at work in societies that forbid "the excellent to excel, lest the inferiority of the inferior be revealed." In contrast to social blindness,

Rand and Rush . . . want to see. . . . If the blind belief in automatic equality prevails, then not even the excellent will any longer bother to excel, since they will not be allowed to, nor be rewarded for it. They will not even see the need to excel, nor feel guilty for not excelling. Everyone will have only mediocre sites to aim for. (116)

The anti-egalitarian creed is most clearly demonstrated in "The Trees":

The song depicts a dispute between the shorter Maples and the towering Oaks. The Maple gripe is this: the Oaks are too tall! They hog all the light! But who can blame the Oaks

for being proud of their height? Perhaps a bit smugly they wonder why the Maples can't be happy in their shade. The Maples scream "Oppression!" The Oaks, befuddled, just shake their heads. The Maples get organized and demand equal rights. The solution? Oak ascendancy is over, thanks to a just decree. All trees henceforth are chopped down to equality. The Lowest Common Denominator becomes the rule. The Maples, of course, are those who mutter "I'm as good as you!" and who hobble their superiors to make it so in truth! (96)

Throughout the Rush corpus, the authors argue, these Randian themes are fully explored, paralleling too the ideas of both Heidegger and Nietzsche, who rejected "inauthentic existence" and "the herd," respectively (97).

Though Rush embraces a Randian individualist ideology, the search for individual authenticity remains a hallmark of Progressive rock more generally. Stump (1997) views Progressive rock as "the soundtrack to the counter-cultural upheavals of the late 1960s, and the period's gallant pipedream of thoroughgoing societal and cultural transformation" (9). For Stump, Progressive rock artists were always "driven by high Romantic notions of personal expression and originality, individual authenticity, honesty and similar praiseworthy universals." They "scorned convention" and "adopted genuinely radical revolutionary artistic and political viewpoints and splinted their musical experimentation with rigorous theoretical radicalism" (10). This "revolution," though usually left-of-center and, at times, philosophically esoteric, had an "all-embracing" spiritual, cultural, and political character (43). In its scope, if not in its content, it was a revolution the form of which Rand would have appreciated, given her own belief in the necessity for comprehensive social change.

That Rand's brand of individualism might contribute to the search for authenticity sought by Progressive rock musicians is dismissed by Stump, however. Stump argues that the rise of the New Right—of Reaganism, Thatcherism, and their "bourgeois" materialist values—actually hastened the decline of Progressive rock. For

Stump, the New Right's impact on Progressive rock is precisely captured in Rush—a band that is “Thatcherite/Reaganite politics made music: all the technique, all the surface of Progressive without its conciliatory nature” (258). Aesthetically, Stump criticizes Rush for its “clunking riffs and bludgeoning bass,” but he recognizes that Rush’s “repertoire also included elaborately constructed suite-like compositions . . . whose variation of mood, timbre and metre are among the nearest to true English Progressive custom that North America ever got” (257). Still, because it finds inspiration in the works of “far-Right Canadian [sic] philosopher Ayn Rand,”¹⁴ Rush’s lyrics have “featured social prescriptions of varying toxicity, such as exhortations to ‘philosophers and ploughmen’ to know their respective places” (257).¹⁵ Ultimately, such “New Right politics systematically discredited the utopian and prescriptive postures of the 1960s” (265).

The Ominous Parallels: Martin and Rand

Of all the books surveyed here, Martin’s is by far the most philosophically intense and the most left-wing, which makes its engagement with Rand’s work all the more provocative. Martin (1998) is a Marxist philosopher, even if he is decidedly “unorthodox” (11). But just as Macan (1997, 177) criticizes the “neo-Marxist view of music” for its “overly rigid ideology,” Martin (1998, 124) too rejects “narrow and monological” Marxism, which “has nothing to learn from outside of itself.” Deriving lessons from Lenin, Mao, Sartre, Theodor Adorno, Frederic Jameson, and Jacques Derrida, he criticizes the “mechanistic claims” of historical materialism (324 n. 25) and economism (325 n. 37) as “species of philosophical idealism” (324 n. 25). His “larger aim is to develop” a comprehensive “philosophy and social theory of progressive rock” (xiv).¹⁶

For Martin,

Great art engages in “poiesis,” the creation of worlds. It seems clear to me that progressive rock aspires to this and, at least in the best work, contributes to such creation. This

is where the division between “politics” and “art” breaks down, for it is obviously a “political” act to imagine a world—even if that world contains little of, or even seems to negate, what counts as “politics” in our world. (xv)

In some respects, Martin seems to be describing Rand’s own aesthetic practice. Though Rand (1975b, 22) argues that “[a]rt is not the means to any didactic end,” that it is the “handmaiden” neither of morality nor politics, she surely understood the ways in which literary forms of art could communicate moral and political ideals. Her own imagining of a new world was itself the outgrowth of her literary purpose—namely, “*the projection of an ideal man*” (162)—which required the definition and presentation of those social “conditions which make him possible and which his existence requires” (163). Even though Martin dismisses Rand’s project as reactionary, there is fertile ground here for comparison between their approaches to art and culture.

Like Macan, Martin (1998, 68–69) recognizes a semiotic function in music, for

just as no sound or mark has a meaning in and of itself, but only in the *context* of a system of signs—and it turns out that systems of signs are themselves *necessarily* open-ended—so also is it the case that musical elements, either at the level of the individual element or the whole work, only have significance in a larger context, a context that turns out to be historical and social. Of course, there is no such thing as an “individual” or “particular” musical element, except perhaps in a purely hypothetical or heuristic sense, but instead only elements in relation. In other words, if one tries to isolate a “single” musical element, for example some “note,” one will find that there are always other elements that are inextricably attached . . .¹⁷

Rand would have appreciated this contextual emphasis on aesthetic structure. She understood the principles entailed and applied these to her own craft as a writer. “[T]he requirements of your context

come first," Rand (2001, 77) instructs. To grasp the full context is simultaneously to understand the "integration of the total" as constituted by the sentences, paragraphs, sections, chapters, and parts taken in their unity. Rand argues that "[e]very aspect of a work has to be integrated into the total, whether paragraphs into a chapter or chapters into a book" (160).¹⁸

This emphasis on organic unity in art, which finds expression in Rand's aesthetic writings, harks back to Aristotle. Both Rand and Martin embrace Aristotle's legacy in several important ways. Like other humanistic Marxists, such as Roy Bhaskar (1993, 265, 284), Martin (1998) fully endorses the "human project . . . argued for by Aristotle: the bringing about of *eudaimonia*, *flourishing*, which involves an intertwining of the good person, the good life, and the good society. If the question is, What might humanity *hope* for and *strive* for, I don't see any other answer" (7). This endorsement of a eudaimonistic ethos has direct parallels with Rand's own moral philosophy, as Den Uyl and Rasmussen (1984) have argued. Rand, however, would not have drawn inspiration from Kant, Marx, Heidegger, and Sartre as Martin has; she would also not have applied its principles to an appreciation of Progressive rock. Still, like Rand, Martin (1998) acknowledges that personal "flourishing" requires a larger context suited for human sociality, just as art remains a powerful mechanism for projecting human potential. Thus, there is "a fundamental connection between thoughtfulness and care in art and an engagement with the possibilities of human flourishing" in life (16).

For Martin, Progressive rock is significant because it has always accentuated certain "utopian" ideals of human possibility as a means to their realization. This is "music with a *project*," with "an orientation to the future" (61). It embraces a "redemptive politics of utopia" (149).¹⁹ Martin argues that this utopian element in the music is not "merely propagandistic" (119), though he believes there are exceptions to this rule.

Seemingly unaware of the parallels between his own aesthetic and ethical principles and those of Rand, Martin maintains that, while Progressive rock can deal "with interesting ideas, . . . [a]t its worst,

progressive rock is like Ayn Rand—bad ideas, bad writing (any reader of this book will surely know why I chose this example)." The reason for choosing this particular example, of course, is that Rush, a Progressive rock band, was profoundly influenced by Rand. Martin views Rush, therefore, as a "mixed bag," for even though its music is "often pretty good," its "ideas are bad" (119–20).

Martin's detailed discussion of the importance of Rush, especially its album *2112*, is instructive. "Despite all the things that people generally say about this group or some of its albums," writes Martin, "and despite the ideological inspiration for *2112* in particular, I think the album is basically good" (239).²⁰ Characterizing Rush as one of the "postseventies trajectories of major progressive rock groups," he does not rank its music with such innovative bands as Yes, Genesis, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer or King Crimson. However, he understands "the appeal of Rush's combination of Yes-like progressive inclinations and Zeppelin-like hard-rock leanings" (270).²¹ He applauds this "band of very good and constantly improving musicians who were interested in difficult, extended compositions that were motivated by philosophical ideas." But he still takes exception to the ideas.

In its attempts at "an epic musical presentation of the ideas of Ayn Rand[,] . . . Rush has been unfairly burdened," argues Martin (270–71). He seems happy that the band eventually "grew out of their fixation on Rand," and that they grew musically as well, despite no exposure on radio or MTV.²² Though he suspects that it was only Peart who was genuinely influenced by Rand, Martin criticizes Stump for rejecting Rush as "the ideological degeneration of progressive rock in the years of Thatcher and Reagan." Martin suggests that Rush is squarely within the Progressive rock tradition in its "engagement with . . . 'heavy' ideas," even if these ideas are to be repudiated (271).

While an extended critical analysis of "Ayn Rand Thought" (or "A.R.T.") is beyond the scope of Martin's book, he still asserts that her philosophy is "deeply incoherent," and dismisses both its anti-collectivism and its appeal to "middle-class adolescents," most of whom embrace it in their search for "self-definition" (270–71).

Deriding her personal life and dismissing her “tastes in art” as a “nutty hodgepodge . . . dressed up, as was the chain smoking that eventually killed her, in terms of all-powerful Reason,” Martin says of Rand’s “world,”

that there is no place for anyone who is not a fully formed adult . . . People must come from nowhere, so that they will not in any way be in debt to other persons. Rand hated rock music, and she was repulsed by such expressions of collectivity as the Woodstock “spirit.” . . . Claiming to build her life on egoism and the pursuit of happiness, she was a deeply miserable person who made others around her miserable as well (all of this is well-documented in the books about Rand by her former disciples the Brandens). Her novels are defenses of capitalism built around characters, such as architect Howard Roarke [sic], who in some ways have admirable qualities but are in no way the real stuff of contemporary capitalism.²³ (270–71)

As we have seen, this negative view of Rand in the Progressive rock literature has been disputed by writers such as the Prices. But the most important challenge to the left-wing critics comes from musicologist Durrell S. Bowman, whose provocative essay, “Let Them All Make Their Own Music: Individualism, Rush, and the Progressive/Hard Rock Alloy, 1976–77,” appears in the Holm-Hudson anthology, *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*.²⁴

Rand and Rush Reconsidered

Bowman’s contribution to the literature is significant because it shows a genuine grasp of Rand’s broader philosophic message. He opens his essay with two passages. The first, taken from Peart’s 1981 interview in *Creem*, states: “I think . . . Everything I do has Howard Roark [Ayn Rand’s fictional individualist architect] in it, you know, as much as anything. The person I write for is Howard Roark.” Counterposed to this statement is Bob Mack’s comment, from

“Confessions of a Rush Fan”: “Neil Peart’s rugged individualism . . . makes Metallica’s James Hetfield seem like a Commie by comparison” (Bowman 2001, 183). One need not know anything about Hetfield or his politics to appreciate the drama of the comparison. But it is upon such statements that Bowman’s essay builds. The writer does not ridicule Rand’s private life as a substitute for a reasoned exposition of her thought. He is keenly aware that Rand’s individualism and supreme belief in human agency is the chief inspiration for Rush’s brand of Progressive rock.

Most importantly, Bowman resists Macan’s and Martin’s view that Progressive rock is necessarily connected to left-wing counter-cultural ideology, spiritualism, and mysticism. Bowman notes that the left’s communalism was coming undone by 1969, making way for a vast ideological diversification in the rock aesthetic.²⁵ He writes:

For many rural, small-town, and suburban working-class and lower middle-class young men born at the end of the baby boom (1955–65), progressive rock was fanciful, escapist music; especially in its formal complexities, its virtuosity, and its elaborate instrumentation and stage shows. For the same audience, a shift in ideology away from New Left communalism at the end of the 1960s made it possible for the emerging genre of “progressive” rock to avoid being revolutionary (or even political) in a Marxist kind of way. Instead, in the aftermath of the counterculture (around 1969–71), individualism and libertarianism emerged as ideological options and came to be aligned with progressive rock and hard rock so that even comparatively cynical, individual-squelched-by-society songs from the early 1990s by the eclectic American hard rock and heavy metal band Metallica—such as “The Unforgiven” and “My Friend of Misery”—are consistently dark and defeatist within each song compared to the elaborate, multisectional “individual struggle, defeated” narratives of certain Rush songs from the late 1970s.²⁶ (189)

It was Peart’s presence in the band that moved it “into an

ideologically individualist, libertarian, and semiobjectivist direction for several years," says Bowman (190). Peart's adherence to individualism inspired the animosity of "nearly every rock critic," but it gave expression to a group of disenfranchised rock fans who were without "spokespersons" for their individualist cause (190–91).

Bowman argues that, from 1975 on, Rush's music constituted a virtual "libertarian social critique." In such songs as "Anthem," and on such albums as *2112*, Rush "pursues a proindividualist/antiauthoritarian subject matter," one inspired by Randian and science-fiction imagery (191–92). Rock critics, however, labeled the music "fascist," an epithet hurled frequently at Rand herself. The band's "affinity for the objectivist political philosophy and . . . highly individualist literary characters of the Russian-born American writer," led them to extol "selfishness as a virtue." Thus, Peart's lyrics became a virtual "transliteration" of Rand's ideas "for the postcounterculture rock generation." Even "the music *itself*" echoes Rand's epic novels by following "a large-scale, progressive rock narrative" (192).

Bowman recognizes that Rand "detested rock music" because of its association with the "collectivist ideas" of the 60s counterculture.²⁷ But he admits that "[i]t is impossible to know what she would have thought of Rush's very sympathetic applications of her ideas in rock music a decade later" (192).

Bowman agrees with other writers that *2112* is among the most important Randian applications in the Rush oeuvre. Bowman explains that, in this work, "Rush establishes an administrative priest 'collective' as the antihero of a futuristic totalitarian world called Syrinx" (194). In the section, "The Temples of Syrinx," this priest collective personifies dogmatism in its control of literature, music, and art. The hero of the narrative makes his appearance in the section entitled "Discovery," where he secretly explores his creative side away from the restrictive prohibitions of the totalitarian society in which he lives. The "main hero's music" is neither "forceful" nor "determined," says Bowman, but "gentle," signifying, perhaps, a resolute certainty that need not be overbearing in its tenor (195).

Bowman draws direct parallels between the hero of *2112* and Rand's protagonist in *Anthem*, Equality 7–2521.²⁸ Whereas Rand's

hero "rediscovers the principles of electric light and the idea of individual identity, . . . [while] battling a totalitarian state," Rush's hero "rediscovers . . . the electric *guitar*," which he learns to both tune and play (195–96). When, in the next section, "Presentation," the hero seeks to persuade the priests of the value of his discovery, they condemn him for trying to incite an "individualist social revolution" (196). In the fifth section of the piece, "Oracle: The Dream," Rush's hero dreams of a utopian world where individuals flourish and creativity reigns—a reimagining akin to what Martin praises as "poiesis"—but it becomes clear in the sixth section, "Grand Finale," that the priests will have none of this. Their reassertion of control spells the death of the individual's antiauthoritarian revolt.

Amazingly, Bowman argues, critics assumed that the authoritarian victory symbolized a nascent "fascist" streak in Rush.²⁹ Instead of viewing the end of *2112* as a comment about the destructive character of authoritarian rule (exemplified by the Syrinx' theocracy), critics such as J. Kordosh concluded that for Rush, as for Rand, individualism *is* fascism.³⁰ Bowman quotes Kordosh: "I don't want to add that many people consider Ayn Rand to be *prima facie* fascist, but I will anyway" (199). It is against this knee-jerk sentiment that Bowman rails:

The "many people" believed by Kordosh to consider Rand a fascist are probably the "new liberals" of the 1960s and '70s, who—because of their communalist, civil rights, and otherwise left-wing emphases were unable to reconcile extreme individualism with anything but extreme authoritarianism. . . . Individualism is not fascism . . . It certainly does not *equal* fascism . . . (199)

It is hardly surprising that such a bold yet simple statement stands in direct opposition to the interpretations of Rand and Rush offered by most of Bowman's predecessors in the Progressive rock literature.

One can therefore agree with Martin (1998, xv), the Marxist philosopher, that the Progressive rock imagining of ideal worlds does entail a breakdown in "the division between 'politics' and 'art'." But

one need not dismiss the profundity of the imagining or the profundity of the art simply because one opposes the character of the politics. Bowman's reconsideration of Rand and Rush is therefore a reconsideration of Rock itself, since it fundamentally questions any strict identity between Progressive rock and left-wing ideology. Future scholars of the subject, unencumbered by the trappings of dogma, might bring a more balanced assessment both of Rand's own brand of "redemptive politics" and her enormous impact on popular culture.

Notes

1. Thanks to Robert Campbell, Allen Costell, Matthew Graybosch, Joseph Maurone, Karen Michalson, and Andrew Taranto for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. The usual caveat applies.

2. Though the *Mystic Rhythms* book cover lists Carol Selby Price and Robert M. Price as co-authors of the work, the author header throughout the book carries the name of the former alone. For the purposes of this review, I will maintain the dual-authorship credit.

3. For Rand's review of Kubrick's *Odyssey*, see Rand and Holzer 1969.

4. References to Tolstien can be found in the compositions of bands throughout contemporary hard and Progressive rock, including Led Zeppelin and Rush. Hesse and Heinlein references can be found in certain Yes compositions. It must be remembered that Heinlein himself paid homage to Rand, whom he admired, in *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, which "described a sentient computer as the 'John Galt' of a lunar revolution against a tyrannical Earth." See "Hero of the Day: Robert A. Heinlein" at <<http://www.dailyobjectivist.com/Heroes/RobertHeinlein.asp>>.

5. While it is not certain if Rand had any direct influence on Emerson, Lake, or Palmer, it should be noted that the song "Mass," which immediately precedes "Manticore" on *Tarkus*, features Rand-like, anti-religious themes—directed against priests as "messenger[s] of fear." On this point, thanks to Robert Campbell.

6. Despite obvious differences between Rand and the "leftist" counter-culture she criticized, Riggenbach (1979, 1982) has argued persuasively that the feminists, gay activists, and student rebels of the sixties were among Rand's "disowned" children. By extension, it might be said that Rand's message of individual autonomy may have influenced even those within Progressive rock who wedded this message to a decidedly leftist political agenda. (For one interpretation of the "gay" appeal of Progressive rock, with specific analysis of Yes's "Close to the Edge," see Dirk von der Horst's "Precarious Pleasures: Situating 'Close to the Edge' in Conflicting Male Desires," in Holm-Hudson 2001, 167–82.)

7. Macan's point with regard to heavy metal is open to debate. For example, Matthew Graybosch states (in a personal correspondence) that heavy metal is not a single genre. Whereas many "sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll" heavy metal bands exist, there are also such genres as Black Metal and Death Metal (which embrace

despair, nihilism and depravity as "ends in themselves"), and a hybrid form known as "Progressive Metal," which incorporates classical influences (e.g., Yngwie Malmsteen, Dream Theater, Queensryche, Symphony X, Nightwish, Therion, Rhapsody, and to a lesser extent, Iron Maiden). Graybosch writes:

These bands also explore myth, critique society (listen to "Operation Mindcrime" by Queensryche for a scathing indictment of American society in the late 1980s), raise abstractions, and rely on virtuosity. Therion, since their release of *Vovin* in 1998 has made use of orchestras, choirs, and solo singers—with the traditional metal guitars, bass, and drums as parts of a harmonic whole. Therion's lyrics are mainly mystical in nature, but in their more recent release, *Secret of the Runes*, they've woven 11 pieces around the nine worlds of Norse mythology, the void Ginnungagap, and the worldtree Yggdrasil. Nightwish's . . . lyrics are woven mainly of myth and dream, and their music ranges in style . . . Rhapsody's three albums (*Legendary Tales*, *Symphony of Enchanted Lands*, *Dawn of Victory*) tell . . . a Homeric epic of a warrior on a quest against a ravaging evil, set to lush symphonic arrangements worthy of the better Hollywood films.

Rand scholar Karen Michalson (in a personal correspondence) adds that Macan's "Apollonian-Dionysian division, while useful in a general sense, is far too simplistic and neat." For Michalson, "Macan's assignation of Dionysian attributes to heavy metal is especially problematic." Michalson points out that both "heavy metal" and "Progressive rock" serve as "umbrella" terms for a wide range of styles; they are not monolithic or uniform. Such subgenres as "Death Metal" and "Black Metal" might be "consciously nihilistic," says Michalson, but they are not

Dionysian in any sense. Dionysus is a god of visions, of mystic experiences — and frenzied possession. Under the influence of Dionysus, one sees into other worlds, one becomes inspired with the visions and dreams necessary to create great art. Dionysus might be the symbol of wild abandon, but for the ancient Greeks the point was to become inspired and possessed by the god in order to have divine visions, which might entail saying and doing things that seem unintelligible and crazy by mere mortal standards. The Dionysian frenzy is a state of higher, mystic consciousness that opposes nihilism, although in its wild unintelligibility and acts of violence (e.g., Maenads tearing apart live animals), Dionysian possession and nihilism can easily look like each other.

It should be noted that in addition to her Rand scholarship (Michalson 1999; 2001), Michalson is a hard rock musician whose own style has a Progressive edge. She serves as the bassist, vocalist, and keyboardist of the band Point Of Ares, and like Progressive rockers before her, she has mined the Apollonian-Dionysian myth for thematic inspiration. The band's second album, *The Sorrows of Young Apollo*, is a "hard-edged progressive rock odyssey through the myth cycles of Apollo and Dionysus" <<http://www.arularecords.com/pointofares>>.

8. This reconciliation of Apollonian and Dionysian elements takes place in the composition, "Cygnus X-1, Book II" from *Hemispheres*, which is not the same as "Cygnus X-1 [Book I]" from *A Farewell to Kings*. Bowman (2001, 218 n. 51) points out that Peart's exploration in the former composition of "left-brain versus right-brain thought processes" is an "anthropomorphized" expression "about Apollonian versus Dionysian cults and the arrival of balance through a god named Cygnus."

9. On this point, Peart suggests agreement with the maverick feminist Camille Paglia who argues: "I believe in both Apollo and Dionysus. So I think that my system is more complete" than Rand's (Paglia 1999, 78). In an interview with *Liberty* writer Scott Bullock, Peart is "inclined to write off Rand's hostility toward the Woodstock kids as a 'generational thing'" (Bullock 1997, 39). Peart has stated further that his differences with Rand on these and other issues prevented him from becoming "a Randroid . . . a true believer. I realized that there were certain elements of her thinking and work that were affirming for me, and others that weren't. That's an important thing for any young idealist to discover—that you are still your own person" (39).

10. Rush's devoted fans are not restricted to Canada and the United States. Stump (1997, 257) writes: "That the body of their army of adoring fans in the UK usually sewed their name on to their leather jackets alongside logos of such Jurassic-era axe-thrashers as Vardis and Samson seems odd; but Rush's penchant for stompalong melodic hooks and tendency to live volume and solo overkill sold well amid the HM fraternity."

11. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that there is an overall problem with interpretations of Rush as a strictly Rand-based band. As Allen Costell remarks (in a personal correspondence), there are 25 or so years of Rush recordings to consider, and most writers tend to focus on the earlier, more hard-core "Randian," years as if they are representative of the entire Rush corpus. Much of the Randian message remains, though more subtly, in later years—right up through the band's 2002 release, *Vapor Trails*—but Peart himself notes the influence of other thinkers on his own philosophy of life, including Carl Jung (whose psychology "provides themes for a number of his songs") and John Dos Passos (Bullock 1997, 46). On these points, see also note 29 below.

12. Bowman (2001, 215 n. 16) equates this nineteenth-century classical liberal perspective with twentieth-century libertarianism, which "advocates individual rights, freedoms, and differences over and above political control and 'sameness.' The 'minimal state' (or less government interference) is preferred."

13. In this instance, as in so many other instances, there are widely divergent ways by which to interpret Neil Peart's lyrics. It is beyond the scope of the current essay to engage in the hermeneutic exercise of weighing critical lyrical interpretations, but it is my hope that this essay will contribute to a much-needed reassessment of that lyrical content. For example, it might be shown that the frequent misinterpretation of Peart's lyrics are not unlike the misinterpretation of Rand's works. A genuinely critical analysis is needed to get beyond the superficiality of these interpretations; this would also enable scholars to reach beyond the overtly political themes of Rush's earlier works and to embrace the whole Rush corpus, with songs dealing variously with heroism, virtue, passionate secular spirituality, and even metaphysical and epistemological themes. On these points, thanks especially to Allen

Costell.

14. Martin (1998, 271) points out Stump's "amusing error of referring to Rand as a 'Canadian.'"

15. While a discussion of the various interpretations and misinterpretations of Peart's lyrics is way beyond the scope of the current survey, it is important to note that some of the analysis offered in this literature is open to dispute. For example, Andrew Taranto elaborates (in a personal correspondence) that Stump has misrepresented this reference to "philosophers and ploughmen," from "Closer to the Heart." Whereas Stump suggests that philosophers and ploughmen must each know their *place*, the lyric actually uses "part" instead of "place":

Philosophers and ploughmen
Each must know his part
To mold a new reality
Closer to the heart

Stump's reference, says Taranto, "implies something of a caste system, which I think is contrary both to the meaning of the lyric, and to the mood of the song (i.e., I think the song overall is hopeful and optimistic)." As Taranto interprets it, the "molding of a new reality" is a "cooperative venture, in which both 'philosophers and ploughmen'—and presumably everyone in between—not only potentially have a role, but must know that role if that 'molding' is going to come to pass. In other words, if members of society are to change it, a necessary condition of such change is cooperation among all of its members—or at least some of its members representing a broad spectrum of professions . . . while one class of members alone (or a subgroup of that class) won't go very far."

16. Though Martin (1998) is "inclined toward systematic radical social theory," he is readily aware of the dangers of totalistic thinking. He argues that it is incorrect to assume that "having a 'systematic' analysis necessarily leads to better music making" (238). Indeed, "no matter how good the theory could potentially be, no social theory or political philosophy could or should tell us the 'one right way' to make music. Which is one thing to be thankful for. The range of good progressive rock is representative of many different ears listening to the future" (121). These words of caution should be well heeded by those within Objectivism who would pass judgment on people's aesthetic tastes as if every preference were a deep psychological confession. On "the problem with the totality" as judged from the faulty perspective of a "totalist" or "strict organicist" orientation, see Sciabarra 2000, 165–66. On the nature of aesthetic response, and its complex relationship to "sense of life" and "moral values," see also Torres and Kamhi 2000, 41–42.

17. For a complementary discussion of the cognitive status of musical tones and percepts, see Bissell 1999, especially 62–70. Also see Jourdain 1997, 103–4. Jourdain emphasizes the dialectical importance of *context* in grasping tones and chords: "Every chord swims in an undulating sea of harmonic context. There is no considering the effects of a chord, or of a change of chord, apart from what has preceded it" (104). Jourdain's book also provides excellent insights into the nature of music and rhythm, showing how each serves the needs of cognition and unit-economy.

18. The importance of "organic unity" in Rand's philosophy extends even to her view of architecture, as her descriptions of Roark's buildings in *The Fountainhead* make clear. For a provocative examination of Rand's perspective on the "organic" functions of architectural design, see Vacker 1999.

19. Though Martin (1998) espouses certain utopian ideals, he criticizes utopianism in its negative connotation. Utopian visions can be "powerful both as inspiration and heuristic. However, the idea is ungrounded, undialectical, and 'utopian' in a potentially bad sense of the term, if it does not also engage with the possible building blocks of this future" (322 n. 25). On the distinction between utopianism and radicalism, and the reciprocal connections between utopianism and dualism, see Sciabarra 1995, especially 117–21. In the context of Progressive rock, further discussion of dualism and monism can be found in Jennifer Rycenga's essay, "Tales of Change within the Sound: Form, Lyrics, and Philosophy in the Music of Yes," in Holm-Hudson 2001, especially pages 151, 157–58. Rycenga integrates the insights of Hegel, Bergson, and Gramsci in her analysis.

20. Rand would surely applaud Martin for distinguishing clearly between his aesthetic judgment and his emotional response to art. She writes: "The fact that one agrees or disagrees with an artist's philosophy is irrelevant to an *esthetic* appraisal of his work *qua* art" (Rand 1975b, 42).

21. Martin has also authored a book on Yes. See Martin 1996. In this context, Martin (1998, 327 n. 50) observes: "When people write me regarding my book on Yes and say that they like the analysis of the music but dislike the politics of the book, and then go on to praise capitalism, Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, and the idea that 'of course the guys in Yes are just in it for the money, since that's all that motivates anyone,' then I have to think that we are simply not listening to the same music or the same band."

22. Much has been said of Rush's musical roots, growth, and influence. Martin actually cites Rush's *Grace Under Pressure* for providing "a viable direction for postprogressive music" (1998, 271). John S. Cotner views Rush as an heir to such "psychedelic bands" as Cream and The Jimi Hendrix Experience ("Pink Floyd's 'Careful with That Axe, Eugene': Toward a Theory of Textual Rhythm in Early Progressive Rock," in Holm-Hudson 2001, 88 n. 6). Other writers, even critical ones, have praised the band's frequent use of 7/8 time signatures, "not because such a meter is 'complex,'" as John J. Sheinbaum puts it, "but because the admittedly complex meter is used as the backdrop for grooves that sound so smooth, balanced, and straightforwardly regular" ("Progressive Rock and the Inversion of Musical Values," in Holm-Hudson 2001, 42 n. 25). On Rush's influence, Macan (1997, 206) notes "the work of Citadel [which] suggests an extension of Rush's late 1970s style." And Stump (1997, 340) recognizes how "the politically suspect Rush" inspired guitarist Vernon Reid of the hard rock band Living Color. (Campbell points out that Reid was once a member of avant-garde jazz musician Ornette Coleman's group.)

23. Martin's critique extends further. He argues that Roark's credo—that he does not build in order to have clients, but has clients in order to build—would be unacceptable to any contemporary capitalist. Such an "idealistic outlook" might be "more befitting an artist," but it could never guide capitalists in pursuit of profit, since they "only 'build' that which might lead to the generation of profit" (328 n. 5). Free-market economist Mark Skousen would agree with the Marxist Bill Martin that

Rand's "screwball economics," expressed in Roark's "self-centered, highly egotistical" attitudes, is "entirely unrealistic in the real world of commercial building" (Skousen 2001, 39). For a response to Skousen—and, by implication, to Martin as well—see Stephens 2001.

24. Bowman's essay is actually based on Chapter 4 of his nearly complete doctoral dissertation, "Permanent Change: Individualism, Rock Sub-Genres, and the Music of Rush" (University of California, Los Angeles). Other chapters from Bowman's dissertation can be found (in PDF) on his website: <<http://www.durrellbowman.com>>. Thanks to Durrell S. Bowman for pointing this out in a personal correspondence (13 December 2001).

25. Robert Campbell observes (in a personal correspondence) that Bowman's comments about communalism coming undone is similar to the observations of James Lincoln Collier on "free jazz." One of Collier's "complaints about the genre," says Campbell, "was that the usual ideology for it was incoherent, since it advocated individualism and collectivism at the same time. The New York free jazz scene was also coming apart in 1969."

26. Matthew Graybosch suggests that the lyrics to Metallica's "The Unforgiven" are more "Byronic" than they are defeatist or cynical. The lyrics tell "the tale of a child fighting for the right to his own life, only to be crushed because he just isn't strong enough. Its subject seems to fit the Byronic sense of life [in which] an individual must fight for his values with everything he has, only to be crushed by a malevolent world." For Graybosch, this constitutes a thematic similarity to Rush's 2112.

27. Rand may have disliked rock music, but it didn't stop her from corresponding with some of its representative artists. Robert Campbell reminds me that Rand had a cordial exchange with pop and rock guitarist and singer, Duane Eddy, who was kind enough to send her a recording of "Will O' the Wisp" in 1967. See Rand's letter to Eddy (1 June 1967) in Rand 1995, 643.

28. Bowman (2001, 195–96) mistakenly calls Rand's protagonist "Unity 5–3000." There is a "Liberty 5–3000" in *Anthem*, the female companion of "Equality 7–2521," but no "Unity 5–3000."

29. Peart observes that such sentiments led him to make fewer overt references to Rand in his lyrics. Peart tells Bullock: "There was a remarkable backlash, especially from the English press—this being the late seventies, when collectivism was still in style, especially among journalists. They were calling us 'junior fascists' and 'Hitler lovers.' It was a total shock to me." In later recordings, Peart strives "to incorporate [Rand's] ideas in a more subtle manner" (Bullock 1997, 39). Bullock states that Peart's "movement away from hard-core Randianism paralleled [his] rejection of involvement in the organized movement." Peart argues that the movement

became petty and divisive and also factionalized. . . . I tend to stay away from it [now]. It's in the nature of the individualist ethos that you don't want to be co-opted. [Also], the ones most devoted to the cause are the ones with least of a life. . . . The whole philosophy is about doing things . . . with an eye towards excellence and beauty. And that was the one thing that was lacking in any of the coteries surrounding [Rand]. (Peart in

Bullock 1997, 39, 46; last bracketed text mine)

30. Bowman (2001) remarks that even some of Rush's fans made the same interpretive mistake. In Deena Weinstein's "informal survey of ticket-line Rush fans (some of whom knew all the lyrics to '2112') . . . more than 70 percent of them [were] under the impression that Rush was siding with the priests." As mentioned above, Bowman focuses on "Rush's use of energetic heavy metal to depict the totalitarian priests and comparatively gentle music to depict the individualist hero" (200); the confusion may stem from a misunderstanding of the use of such differential instrumentation. This is not the only example in the Rush discography of victory for the antiheroes. Bowman also cites "Xanadu" and "Cygnus X-1" from *A Farewell to Kings* (212).

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