

David Through The Looking Glass

A reply to David Ramsay Steele's 'Alice In Wonderland'

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A few weeks ago (June '92) I was sent some sample copies of *Free Life*. As a libertarian from way back, I enjoyed most of the articles, which were interesting, sane and coolly reasoned.

Then I came to 'Alice in Wonderland' by David Ramsay Steele. This purported to be a review of *The Passion of Ayn Rand* by Barbara Branden, but it quickly became apparent that 'review' was merely a pretext, since 80% of the article was devoted to a vituperative diatribe against Rand herself. The piece seemed out of place in a journal of ideas.

Let me make it clear at the outset that I hold no brief for Ayn Rand. Nor am I qualified to hold one for I have not read any of her books for over twenty years. I was indeed once a keen 'student of Objectivism'. Today, however, I see Rand as an excellent starting point, not the be-all and end-all of philosophy. I agree with her fundamental positions, but I also know that she was not always as rigorous as she thought she was and that some of her precepts are vulnerable upon close examination. I acknowledge too that she was sometimes mistaken, and could be arrogant, overbearing, intemperate, irrational, or even downright ridiculous. She was after all a human being just like the rest of us. But I cannot accept that she deserves the kind of hatchet job inflicted on her in Steele's 'Alice in Wonderland'.

Steele begins by implying that Ayn Rand saw herself as 'a great hero of philosophy' and an 'outstanding writer' [1-17/18. Square brackets refer to Free Life, Vol 5, #1 or #2, followed by page number]. He cites no references for these allegations. Instead he proceeds to ridicule the proposition that she was either a philosopher or a writer at all. Rand's philosophy (which rejects God and

posits a scientific ethics) is dismissed as a 'cult', a 'new religion' or 'creed', with articles, dogmas, and doctrines 'declaimed in strident, bad-tempered prose' [1-17]. It is 'an eccentric mix of disparate elements' [1-18]. Her work was devoid of insight or masterly analysis. She was 'no great thinker in any field' [1-21]. She was 'inclined to sloppy thinking'. She 'took ideas from others' [1-22]. Her own ideas are 'Far-fetched and logically slipshod' and are lambasted by Steele as 'mouth-frothing sloganeering' [2-18], 'tedious drivel', or 'pompous vacuity' [2-19]. Finally, after much more of the same, including Rand's alleged 'denigration of common decencies', Steele closes by denouncing her entire philosophical effort as a 'Gospel of Spleen' [2-23]. When considering Ayn Rand as a writer Steele is confronted by the fact of her success, so he grants her certain merits and accomplishments. Nevertheless, he maintains that Ayn Rand 'never fully mastered English' [2-16] and that she couldn't really write'. (He contrasts her to one Philip K. Dick - unknown to me alas - who 'could really write' [2-19]). Of Rand's *The Fountainhead*, now very widely recognised as an American literary classic, Steele opines that the characters are 'stylised, diagrammatic representations' with 'bizarre motivations' [2-16]. Rand's most important novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, is condemned by Steele as a 'crashing failure' [2-17], the solution to its supposed mystery 'obvious before page 50' [2-18], its characterisation 'not up to the level of [the TV soap] *Falcon Crest*' [2-19]. Steele's final judgement on Rand's literary worth is that, had she stuck to fiction, she 'could have become a sort of minor rightwing Jack London' [2-22].

Not content with pouring scorn upon her work, Steele is at pains to vilify Ayn Rand as a person. He allows that she was 'an intrinsically fascinating figure' [1-23] but for the most part he paints a wholly negative portrait. He alleges ingratitude '*She habitually repaid kindness with indifference or with venom*' [1- 22]); want of generosity; spitefulness; humourlessness [1-21]; sexual ambiguity [2-17]; lack of candour, and discreditable political activity [1-20]. He accuses her of living '*within her own world of fantasy*' [1-22] surrounded by yes-persons

mouthed catch phrases, and of being 'addicted to the idolatry of her besotted admirers' [2-20]. There is plenty more besides.

There are two immediate problems with 'Alice'. The first is that it is almost entirely one-sided. The second is that, whether they are true or not, hardly any of Steele's sarcastic assertions are supported by illustration, quotation, reference or reasoned argument. They are thus entirely unconvincing. I was once a great fan of Ayn Rand. Later, I moved away. I am therefore inclined towards sympathy with Steele's point of view. But the question which arose in my mind after reading these eighteen pages of unremitting hostility was not 'Does Rand really deserve all this?', but 'what on earth is eating David Ramsay Steele?'

My first conclusion in reply is therefore that, if Steele wants to stop people being influenced by Ayn Rand, this is very precisely the wrong way to go about it. He accuses Rand most vociferously of argumentum *ad hominem*, of smearing opponents, of intimidating critics. But 'Alice' itself seems to me to be little more than a smear job, and not even an effective one at that. It reveals the simple truth that vituperation is only persuasive if you are preaching to the converted. Is that what Steele thought he was doing?

So, is Ayn Rand's philosophy drivel? Could she not really write? I shall take the topics in reverse order, the latter being more easily dealt with.

Ayn Rand was born in Russia and did not start to use English in her daily life and work until she arrived in the US at the age of twenty-one. She never completely mastered spoken English; by which I mean she had a Russian accent you could have sheared metal with. But to assert that she did not fully master written English, and could not really write, is just silly.

Rand wrote four novels, all in English: *Anthem*, *We the Living*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*. Each has been a bestseller in its own right - with the bulk of sales occurring at the more educated end of the market. The latter two are among the

most successful novels in publishing history: they are still annual best sellers today, several decades after first publication and ten years after their author's death. According to Laissez-Faire Books of San Francisco, *Atlas Shrugged* alone has sold over five million copies worldwide.

It has to be asked how a writer could possibly achieve such enduring success with the more sophisticated English reader and yet, according to Steele, neither fully master the language nor be 'really' able to write it? It is quite plain that Steele is allowing a venomous dislike of Rand to rule his head. No doubt there are those who actively dislike Stephen Spielberg and his work, but they would be fools to say that he doesn't 'really' know how to make movies. Similarly, one could no doubt dig up plenty of unflattering material on Gary Kasparov, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and John McEnroe, but that doesn't mean they're not 'really' good, at chess, writing pretty tunes or playing tennis.

Of course it is fashionable in certain quarters to deride commercial success. Spielberg was made cruelly aware of this when his film *The Colour Purple*, which he also directed, won all major Oscars except Best Director. Almost by definition, if popular, you can't be good. The masses don't have taste. But isn't this trait rather rare amongst libertarians?

One is tempted to wonder whether something nasty isn't at work. The suspicion grows when Steele comments on Nathaniel Branden's 'extraordinary' success after his break with Rand, noting that *The Psychology of Self Esteem* has been reprinted 21 times [27 is the true figure, I believe]. I would have thought that such a publishing track record warranted at least respect, but Steele sneeringly labels Branden a '*pop psychologist*' [1-20].

Were Steele to advise us that he is Professor Emeritus of English literature at some great university, and cite a string of experts in support, one might take him more seriously. (He complains early on [1-18] about people reading Rand '*without authoritative guidance* - my italics). As it is, the way he writes merely makes one suspect that he has fallen prey to envy, but surely this can't be true?

Obviously, selling millions of books decade after decade is not the first canon of literature, but since Steele does not provide any standards by which to judge Ayn Rand, nor give us any reasoned examples of what he sees as Ayn Rand's literary poverty - he merely asserts or accuses - I don't see any purpose in pursuing the matter further. In the absence of prescribed standards it suffices simply to assert a contrary view. And, on the evidence of 'Alice in Wonderland', I am quite happy to pit my judgement against Steele's.

I found Ayn Rand's English 99.9% flawless, her writing powerful and moving, and most but not all) of her characters and situations compelling and credible. I would maintain that the following random extracts show an author who was completely at home in English; who could really write; and who could really think. (I apologise for any inaccuracies. The quotations are from memory. No library in my neck of the UK boonies carries works by Ayn Rand).

Of religion:

'The tragic joke of human history is that on most of the altars mankind have erected it was the beast that was worshipped and man who was immolated.'

Of sex:

'the one true ecstasy granted to human beings'

Of personal fulfilment:

'The secret of success is to manufacture your own destiny'

Of individual rights:

'a conceptual bridge between reality and politics the prerequisites of human life on earth'

Of welfare in a free society:

'If you wish to help the poor, you will not be stopped'

Of certain politicians:

'people who assume a halo of virtue by practising charity, with wealth that they do not own'

Snatches from The Fountainhead.

Toohey as a child.. 'Elsworth's memory was like a spread of liquid cement. It held anything that fell upon it.'

Toohey, finding Ruark staring at the ruins of a beautiful building he had designed, which Toohey has destroyed:

'Mr Ruark, we're alone here. Why don't you tell me what you think of me?'

'In any words you wish. No one will hear us.'

Ruark: 'but I don't think of you'.

Snatches from Atlas Shrugged.

A gloomy scene: 'a grey spread of ashes that had never been on fire'.

Dagny, to a man who looked like a truck driver in Galt's Gulch:

'And what were you, a professor of comparative philology?' 'No ma'am. I was a truck driver. But that's not what I intended to remain'.

I certainly don't think Ayn Rand was 'the greatest' writer in English, and certainly her novels, her thinking, and her angry essay style can be criticised. But in making the transition from the very different Russian language to our own very complicated English one, in her twenties - which had to include a comprehensive understanding of a new culture and then writing a whole series of blockbuster best-selling novels - of obvious interest and serious literary merit. That may well be an achievement without parallel.

Before looking more closely at Steele's castigation of Randism as a philosophy, I would like to comment on two lesser inaccuracies in 'Alice in Wonderland'. One is Steele's apparent belief that Ayn Rand thought the United States could do no wrong. In Steele's words: *'Among the articles of [Rand's] creed are ... the United States of America is the best society in human history and virtually always entirely in the right in its conflicts with other powers'* [1-17].

While Ayn Rand loved and admired the US as the most freedom loving society the world has known, and as her adopted home, she was far from thinking it beyond reproach. Many of her essays, and more than one of her famous lectures at the Ford Hall Forum, were vigorous attacks on aspects of

American culture and society, and on past and present US governments and their policies. In *Atlas Shrugged*, there is a character who works on the revered US constitution to correct its flaws. To suggest that Rand had some sort of unthinking or slavish devotion to everything American is absurd.

The second inaccuracy concerns smoking. Ayn Rand was a heavy smoker.. Regrettably, she rationalised the 'point of fire' in a smoker's hand as a symbol of the mind at work: 'fire, a dangerous force, tamed at man's fingertips'. She died a few years after being severely weakened by an operation for lung cancer.

Steele alleges that cigarette smoking was part of the Randian creed: 'If you didn't smoke, you had better have a damned good reason - a certificate signed by several Objectivist physicians might be safest' [1-18].

It so happens that I gave up smoking cigarettes the some year I encountered Rand's work, in 1963. As my interest in her ideas deepened, I met numerous 'students of Objectivism' in study groups and lectures in Ottawa, Montreal or Toronto. I also met many American devotees of Rand and one or two from her 'inner circle' in New York. Among all these I honestly cannot recall anybody who smoked, particularly among the ones I knew better, and I definitely do not remember any sort of peer pressure to adopt the habit, or reports of any such pressure. I don't attach any great significance to this historical footnote, but it does perhaps work in counterpoint to Steele's own (anti-Rand) observation: '*surprising reputations often spring from fine details*' [2-23].

Steele's strident, bad-tempered denigration of Ayn Rand's philosophy and of her ability as a thinker is hardly supported by illustration or argument. He seems to regard his own derision as a sufficient yardstick. Instance his attention to Rand's metaphysics and epistemology - which lasts for only one paragraph [2-19].

It is very hard to get a grip on anything expressed so tersely, therefore I shall deal with only one of the three Randian principles

which Steele rejects in the paragraph (two with abrupt declarations of '*False*'). This is Rand's founding premise: 'Existence exists'.

Steele first invents a sense of the statement which is not implied by it: that existence 'is something which exists in addition to all the things which exist. After knocking down his straw man, he goes on:

'If what is meant is that 'Things which exist exist' - existence exists - then that is trite and has never been denied by anyone'.

Prima facie, 'existence exists' may indeed appear to be trite, but I think it is important (and more fair) to consider Rand's principle both in its own context and in the context of Western philosophy generally.

If my memory serves me correctly (again, I apologise for any inaccuracies) - the context from which Rand's premise is taken runs as follows: 'Existence exists, and the act of grasping that axiom implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives, and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty for perceiving that which exists'.

It seemed plain enough to me thirty years ago, and is clear in recollection today, that with such premises Rand was countering the subjectivism and scepticism which have been present, even dominant, in Western philosophy for some two or three hundred years. She was asserting that there is a real world which exists independently of ourselves, and that existents have identities which human minds are uniquely equipped to discover and know. In other words, knowledge is possible. Steele finds this sort of thinking trite, and says nobody's ever denied it.

Surely he can't really mean that? Anyone who knows anything about philosophy has heard of scepticism, the denial that knowledge is possible; and virtually any textbook on philosophy will confirm not only the influence of scepticism on philosophic thought but its lasting attraction for philosophers.

Professor Jonathan Dancy's *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Blackwell

1985, 4th reprint 1991) is a good example. The 'challenge of scepticism', and the claim that 'knowledge is impossible', are presented on the first page of the Introduction. Chapter One is entitled 'Scepticism', and the work concludes (p.241) with the words: '*scepticism may continue more durable, more seductive and more secure than any reply we have found so far*'

Ayn Rand's whole purpose was to counter this sort of negativity. 'Existence exists ...' (etc as above) - is precisely a claim that objective reality exists and that knowledge of it is possible. Rand sought to erect a philosophical edifice in which ordinary people could feel safe. She set out to show that scepticism was untrue; that knowledge was possible; that it was possible to make ethical judgements with conviction; that if one studies existence objectively one discovers that individuals exist for their own sake, not for somebody else's; and that therefore it is right and proper for individuals to pursue personal wealth and happiness. And the only right and proper foundation upon which to build such a philosophy was the reassertion of the ordinary, yes commonplace, observation that existence exists. (It is worthwhile noting as an aside that any layperson can easily demolish philosophical scepticism. The assertion 'knowledge is impossible' presupposes knowledge. One has to know that there is such a thing as 'knowledge' before one can deny it. Further, scepticism can only be expressed by means of concepts with agreed meanings, rationally constructed premises, and processes of logic, all of which are forms of knowledge. Lastly, the statement 'knowledge is impossible' is itself a claim to knowledge. The whole corpus of scepticism is self-contradictory and valueless).

When one examines Steele's charge of triteness in the wider context of Western philosophy, it comes to mind that Steele may have fallen into the commonplace trap of reading history backwards. Today, with libertarian philosophers like Hospers, Nozick, and Rothbard being taken seriously; with Spencer being reprinted; with Aristotelianism being reborn; with Friedman and Hayek winning Nobel prizes for economics; with freedom and free markets

everywhere in the ascendant; it is easy enough to look askance at what may appear to be the rather ordinary concerns of Ayn Rand and the angry manner in which she expounded them.

In the Twenties, Thirties, and Forties, when Ayn Rand was developing her ideas, things were very different. Philosophy was dominated by pragmatism, logical positivism and linguistic analysis. In political thought, socialism was regarded as inevitable. In economics, Keynes was king - with no pretender to his throne - and Roosevelt's New Deal and Britain's Welfare State typified Western government policy. In those days, Hayek and von Mises were more or less unknown refugees, while Henry Hazlitt was a widely-disregarded journalist.

And who, among the 'greats' of the day, was defending personal liberty in terms that could be understood? Whatever the virtues of the likes of Ayer, Dewey, Russell, Sartre, Wittgenstein *et al*, they certainly did not write for the laity. And can it be said that they boosted ordinary folk's confidence in human ability to judge and to know? Did these thinkers provide an ethical basis for individualism or market economics. If they did, it didn't exactly catch on.

Ayn Rand attempted to fill the breach. She literally could not believe her eyes at what passed for thought in the West. She had lived through the Russian communist revolution, had seen the horrific results of socialism first hand, yet all around her were so-called intellectuals busily working to establish socialism in America. Little wonder she was irascible.

The only part of '*Alice in Wonderland*' which looks at all closely at Rand's philosophy is the penultimate section, entitled 'Egoistic Ethics' [2-21]. By this time, however, the reader is so suspicious of Steele and his motives that it is no longer possible to give him much credence. The sneering, vituperative style drags on, and since he neither presents Rand's arguments clearly or fairly, nor quotes her at all adequately, the contradictions into which he tries to lead her simply don't ring true.

He also employs a *non sequitur* in his third sentence which trips up the rest of his

harangue. He states that Ayn Rand maintained (his words, he does not quote):

'What is good for an organism is what contributes to that organism's survival and well-being. This seems clear enough: it is moral to do what is to one's advantage ... to cheat, murder and steal'.

Naturally, this conclusion is the opposite of what Ayn Rand believed, but I do not think many can have been taken in by this attempt at sleight-of-hand.

Two egregious aspects of *'Alice in Wonderland'* remain for comment. One concerns Ayn Rand's followers. Steele heaps scorn upon them at every turn. In some ways he is correct to do so. Many Randians have behaved very badly and some continue to do so. But Steele seems to fall into simplistic reasoning traps of his own making. Most undergraduates go through a process of discovering that ideas which have been presented to them as Holy Writ turn out upon close examination to be unholy rubbish. But it does not follow - as Steele seems to think it does - that whenever people come to regard something as sacred it is necessarily rubbish. Steele is perfectly correct to chastise over-enthusiastic Randians for their 'idolatry', but he is totally incorrect to dismiss Randism - as he appears to do - merely because its author and her followers believed they had discovered the Whole Truth and nothing but. One can utterly despise British soccer hooligans without adjudging soccer to be a bad game.

I also believe Steele misrepresents Rand's attitude towards her followers. Eric Hoger's book on political obsession, *The True Believer*, was warmly recommended to 'students of Objectivism' specifically to warn them against cultism. I can't remember whether the warning was given in *The Objectivist Newsletter* or *The Objectivist*, but both had Rand as joint, and later sole, editor.

I have referred frequently to the splenetic, sarcastic style in which *'Alice in Wonderland'* is written. There is one passage which goes beyond this [1-19].

'The organism which was later to denote itself as 'Ayn Rand' was born in St Petersburg during the abortive Russian

Revolution of 1905, and given the name Alice Rosenbaum'Alice and her family, suffered hardships during the civil war following the Bolshevik putsch. Bolshevik repression served only to encourage in her breast precisely those counter-revolutionary feelings the persecution was designed to extirpate. By chance, Alice avoided the liquidation which the heroine of her first novel, We the Living, could not escape, and in 1926 she contrived to visit relatives in Chicago. Like droves of others before or since, Alice had to lie to get into the US, pretending her visit was intended to be temporary. Despite this, immigration controls were not prominent among the state interventions later denounced by Rand'.

I was startled and disappointed to find such writing in a libertarian publication. To mock suffering of any sort is inhumane, but to sneer in such a patronising fashion at the anguish which an innocent young woman had to endure for nine years during and after the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, and at her decision to escape whatever the cost, is a much wider insult, one which includes all the untold millions who suffered and died under communist rule or in trying to flee from it. This passage in *'Alice in Wonderland'* is, in my view, very close to being obscene.

I mentioned earlier my initial reaction to *'Alice in Wonderland'*: what an earth has gotten under the skin of David Ramsay Steele? An answer can perhaps be found in the article. Steele says he was *'at first dazzled'* and *'inspired'* by *Atlas Shrugged* [2-18]. This may suggest that he is either a jilted suitor - a rude letter from Rand maybe - or an infatuee who later discovered that the object of his devotion was flawed and can't forgive himself for the indiscretion. Surely the type of violent rejection apparent in Steele's writing comes only from withered love? 'Hell hath no fury ...' can apply equally to men (or is David Ramsay Steele the pen name of Daisy Rose Stahlblum?!)

To conclude, I am sure any detached observer would agree that, as with the work of anybody else, Ayn Rand's writing and thought benefits from re-examination and re-evaluation. But, if they are to be done at all,

such tasks need to be carried out calmly and methodically, and to be animated by more than mere dislike. *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand* by Den Uyl and Rasmussen (University of Illinois Press, 1984) is a good example of such an approach.

One seldom defeats an opponent by frontal assault, which is really all Steele has done. Further, he uses the same dubious tactics he derides in Rand. By all means let's subject Randism to detailed criticism, but for goodness sake let's leave our feelings out of the matter until we reach a definitive judgement. Were I to meet Mr Steele, I would be inclined to offer him a Looking Glass with the suggestion that he ought first to cast the beam out of his own eye. On present form, alas, I fear that he would merely head-butt his own reflection.

Postscript

Since writing my reply to Steele's '*Alice in Wonderland*' I have obtained and read both Barbara Branden's *The Passion of Ayn Rand* (referred to below as TPAR) and Nathaniel Branden's *Judgement Day*. I have also re-read, for the first time since 1965, Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. In the light of this new and renewed reading, I would like to add three points to my piece 'David through the Looking Glass'.

First, on the basis of *The Fountainhead* alone, I am completely confident in asserting that Ayn Rand was a great novelist and a master of the English language. I challenge anybody to prove the contrary. (Note: I discovered that my two quotes from the novel were inaccurate. I have been able to correct these, but apologise for the presumable inaccuracy of the other quotations, which I am unable to rectify at present.)

Second, the Brandens' work shows that Ayn Rand was - in some aspects of her character and in some of her actions - far worse than Steele makes out. Had Steele paused to think before unleashing his bilious tirade, he could have presented a much more damning indictment. I shall address this matter further in a forthcoming review of *Judgement Day*.

Third, Steele's penchant for misrepresentation is far worse than I at first thought. For instance, he records correctly in '*Alice*' that Rand appeared in 1947 as a 'friendly witness' before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigating Communist infiltration in Hollywood. He then adds, '*Branden makes some gestures towards defending Rand for this discreditable activity*'. In fact, Barbara Branden devotes four full pages (TPAR pp.199-203) - over 2000 words to a rather careful and noncommittal record of Rand's involvement in the HUAC hearings. To label Mrs Branden's account as 'gestures towards defending' is totally misleading.

Further, judging by Mrs Branden's evidence, Ayn Rand's participation was not discreditable. Rand had been outspoken in her opposition to Communism ever since she arrived in the United States. In the late thirties, she was actually blacklisted in Hollywood and unable to obtain work - in spite of previous successes as a screenwriter and playwright - solely due to her anti-Communist views [TPAR p.127]. She refused to be cowed, however. When she noticed that Communist sympathisers were surreptitiously inserting socialist propaganda into otherwise innocent movies, Rand wrote a pamphlet - '*Screen Guide for Americans*' - exposing the ploy. In the pamphlet, she strongly defended the Communists' right to free speech, but condemned them for trying to slide their views unnoticed into the culture. (Their methods resembled the outlawed system of subliminal, or 'flash', advertising). Rand's warning was widely reproduced and quoted, and was probably one of the main reasons she was asked to testify by HUAC.

Rand nonetheless had deep misgivings about the whole undertaking and only agreed to go to Washington if HUAC agreed to her terms. They did. She went. They reneged. She denounced them immediately, loudly, and publicly, and refused to have anything further to do with HUAC in spite of strenuous efforts by the Committee Chairman to persuade her to become their 'chief ideological investigator'.

In time, the inept HUAC hearings turned out to be a great propaganda coup for the

American left. In his anxiety to denigrate Rand, Steele has done his little bit to perpetuate some enduring socialist myths.

A more serious example of Steele's use of misrepresentation in *'Alice in Wonderland'* occurs when he alleges that Rand was sexually ambiguous. In support, he cites Barbara Branden to the effect that 'when she [Rand] was young she had a fierce crush on a beautiful female tennis player'. The episode is described by Barbara Branden very differently (TPAR pp.9-10); viz:

Rand went on holiday to a hotel in the Crimea where she was able to watch tennis, at that time an unusual phenomenon in Russia'. One day, her attention was caught by 'a slender graceful young girl racing after the ball and smashing it effortlessly over the net'. An English visitor, Rand was told. She became fascinated by this 'sophisticated, foreign figure'. Years later, in her fifties, Rand still remembered the English girl as 'amazing ... a creature out of a different world, my idea of what a woman should be ... a symbol of the independent woman from abroad I didn't long to approach her or to get acquainted, I was content to admire her from afar'.

Branden adds her own comment, that the young woman served for Rand as 'a projection, an image that she was to use in her fiction', particularly in the creation of the heroine of *Atlas Shrugged*, Dagny Taggart. As the context makes entirely clear, Branden was using the incident to illustrate Rand's possessiveness over her values. There is nothing remotely sexual in Branden's reading of the incident, nor in her intention at that point in her biography.

Misreporting Barbara Branden, distorting the episode into 'a fierce crush', and then adducing it as evidence of sexual ambiguity, is all bad enough. But Steele also neglects to point out that the events occurred in 1912, in obviously constrained social circumstances; that the 'English girl' was twelve; and that little Alice Rosenbaum (Ayn Rand) was then seven years old.

For the record, Ayn Rand did have a problem with her femininity, but this consisted of a

dislike of her own appearance and constant self-doubt about her attractiveness. Aside from that, Barbara Branden's book makes clear that Rand was entirely heterosexual and a thoroughgoing man-worshipper besides. (Nathaniel Branden's account makes this even plainer.) Steele's innuendos are impotent - in keeping with the rest of his article.

I cannot tell whether Steele's misrepresentations are fully conscious and intentional. I suspect they are partially slapdash, partially caused by a belief that his audience is safe enough and that therefore he can get away with anything. Also, Ayn Rand is dead, and death is often the servant of detraction.

Whatever the case, in my judgement, Steele is guilty of intellectual dishonesty of a very low order. However, he is in the right company. As readers of *Judgement Day* or *The Passion of Ayn Rand* will discover, Ayn Rand's respect for truth in certain matters makes Steele look like her court historian.

Free Life