

The Three “Furies” of Libertarianism: Rose Wilder Lane, Isabel Paterson, and Ayn Rand

Jennifer Burns

“They make all of us male writers look like Confederate money,” wrote the curmudgeonly cultural critic Albert Jay Nock in 1943. According to Congressman Howard Buffett, they “have talent that surpasses that of almost any mere male that I know in the country.” Reflecting on the rise of the Right over the course of the twentieth century, the journalist John Chamberlain noted, “If it had been left to pusillanimous males probably nothing much would have happened.” To William F. Buckley Jr., they were the “three furies” of libertarianism: the children’s author and magazine writer Rose Wilder Lane, the book critic Isabel Paterson, and the best-selling novelist Ayn Rand. Popular writers who are not typically remembered as significant intellectuals, Lane, Paterson, and Rand nonetheless exerted, according to their contemporaries, a powerful influence on the ideological development of the American Right.¹

But what exactly was this influence, and how should historians make sense of the striking presence of three women, bound by similar life experiences and tenuous bonds of friendship, at the core of modern antistatism? It seems more than coincidence to find three women at this pivotal moment, yet Lane, Paterson, and Rand resist easy analysis on the grounds of gender. They did not claim their womanhood as a source of particular wisdom and did not identify with women as a group. The triumphant self that ran through their fiction could manifest itself in both male and female guise. Moreover, after early writing careers focused on the lives and specifically gendered experiences of women, all three abandoned these concerns as they shifted to political work. The individualism they developed as mature intellectuals advanced no coherent portrait of gender—by turns

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¹ Albert Jay Nock to Mrs. Edmund C. Evans, Aug. 7, 1943, in *Letters from Albert Jay Nock, 1924–1945, to Edmund C. Evans, Mrs. Edmund C. Evans and Ellen Winsor*, ed. Frank W. Garrison (Caldwell, 1949), 183. Howard Buffett to John Chamberlain, June 13, 1952, box 7, Isabel Paterson Papers (Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa). John Chamberlain, *A Life with the Printed Word* (Chicago, 1982), 136. William F. Buckley Jr., “John Chamberlain, RIP,” *National Review*, May 1, 1995, p. 25.

ignoring women altogether, imagining them as figures interchangeable with men, or proposing them as either stronger than or fundamentally parasitic upon the men in their lives. Nor do Lane, Paterson, and Rand map easily onto what we know about women and conservatism. Although they shared the anticommunist and antiradical views of the women who belonged to groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion, they were resolutely not “joiners,” neither clubwomen nor party women, nor ever affiliated with any woman’s organization.²

Faced with this complexity, historians have by and large chosen to observe rather than analyze. At the 1984 Berkshire Conference of Women Historians (the sixth annual meeting of the group), Linda Kerber presented a paper on Rose Wilder Lane entitled “The Search for a Conservative Feminism,” which perhaps went unfound, as the paper was never published. More recently, Kimberly Phillips-Fein gave a passing nod to Lane, Paterson, and Rand while reviewing a new book about right-wing women. Contemporary libertarians have been eager to celebrate Lane, Rand, and Paterson—the Cato Institute maintains a Web site that “pays homage to three women without whom [the institute] would not exist.” Individual studies of the three women have been written, but their treatment as a group is glancing, at best. The consensus that the trio *matters* is well established—but just how and why remains elusive. Setting these women in relationship to one another is important, not only because that was how their thought developed but also because doing so reveals continuities, patterns, and connections that hint at the women’s larger historical significance.³

This article is an abridged collective biography of Lane, Paterson, and Rand that advances for the first time a historical analysis of their consequence for the twentieth-century

² The flourishing scholarship on traditionally conservative women has established the diversity of women’s political commitments in the twentieth century but still leaves few interpretative frameworks for understanding the work of Rose Wilder Lane, Isabel Paterson, and Ayn Rand. The clubwoman–party woman distinction is from Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill, 2006). Recent works that emphasize antiradicalism include Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia, 2012); and Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, 2012). The role of conservative women in advocating racial hierarchy and fixed gender roles has been explored in Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, 2009); June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-Wing Politics, 1933–1945* (DeKalb, 2002); and Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago, 1996). For a work that follows a theme of moral guardianship, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, 2005). Conservative women and free-market economics are discussed in Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

³ Linda Kerber, “The Search for a Conservative Feminism: Rose Wilder Lane in the Interwar Years,” paper presented to the Sixth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., June 1984, Berkshire Conference, 1984 folder, box 1, William Holtz Collection (Hoover Library). This research appears to have informed Linda K. Kerber, “Women and Individualism in American History,” in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber*, by Linda K. Kerber (Durham, N.C., 1997), 589–609. Kim Phillips-Fein, “Women vs. Women,” *Women’s Review of Books*, 30 (Jan.–Feb. 2013), 3–5. Cato Institute, “Three Women Who Launched a Movement,” *Cato Institute*, <http://www.libertarianism.org/publications/essays/three-women-who-launched-a-movement>. Scholarship on Lane focuses primarily on her collaboration with Laura Ingalls Wilder. For a comprehensive biography that downplays her later libertarianism, see William V. Holtz, *The Ghost in the Little House: A Life of Rose Wilder Lane* (Columbia, Mo., 1993). For an important exception, which was written by economists and analyzes Lane’s antidemocratic tendencies, see David M. Levy, Sandra J. Peart, and Margaret Albert, “Economic Liberals as Quasi-Public Intellectuals: The Democratic Dimension,” in *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, 30 (no. 2, 2012), 1–116. Their research, which has uncovered connections between Lane, Ludwig von Mises, and Joseph Schumpeter, suggest this portion of Lane’s life is ripe for further examination. The political thought of Rand and Paterson is foregrounded in Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York, 2009); and Stephen Cox, *The Woman and the Dynamo: Isabel Paterson and the Idea of America* (New Brunswick, 2004). A work that profiles all three women is Brian Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism: A Freewheeling History of the Modern Libertarian Movement* (New York, 2007), esp. 113–47. For a work that examines a slightly different trio, see David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, “Isabel Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane, and Zora Neale Hurston on War, Race, the State, and Liberty,” *Independent Review*, 12 (Spring 2008), 553–73. For Lane and Paterson

American Right, women's history, and the methods and scope of intellectual history. Focusing primarily on the years of their active friendship during the 1940s, rather than on the complete span of their lives, I examine the political ideas they advanced during this time to demonstrate how all three reworked a deeply personal and gendered sense of individualism into a theory of a free economy centered on the individual as "dynamo," an endlessly renewable energy source being threatened by an encroaching state. A sense of independence born of their experiences as "new women" in the 1920s served as the foundation for a new American libertarianism and gave Lane, Paterson, and Rand the chance to exert intellectual leadership and power over an influential network of businessmen. For a few short years, they worked together as a team and alliance that shaped the nascent conservative movement, before finding individual roles in which they were most comfortable: Paterson as alienated intellectual, Rand as system builder for the masses, and Lane as anonymous behind-the-scenes operator.

While their gendered life experiences did influence their ideas, and can thus help explain why all three were drawn to libertarianism simultaneously, I caution against placing undue weight on this factor. Many women with similar biographies, after all, including professional writers and intellectuals, did not make the same ideological leap. And Lane, Paterson, and Rand ultimately traded a gendered personal understanding of individualism for an abstract political interpretation. For this reason, historians must treat their thought as both shaped by gender and distinct from it, and I accordingly emphasize the experiences, books, and individual relationships that underlay their collective turn to the right.⁴

Gender was certainly critical, though, to the bonds, however fragile, they developed among themselves and with others. Gender is also crucial to understanding their activity within the libertarian subculture, their eventual marginalization from the conservative movement, and the ways they have been overlooked in scholarly accounts of the period. Caroline Winterer's observation about early American women rings true here: "Asking 'where are the women?' does much more than show where the women are in an intellectual network; it has the potential to reveal how the whole network actually operates." Beyond the books and articles they wrote, Lane, Paterson, and Rand had a substantial impact behind the scenes, where they edited articles by syndicated columnists, advised conservative foundations and magazines, and met Herbert Hoover for tea. In essence, they created an intellectual salon that stretched from New York to California, uniting disparate figures with a shared political outlook into a sturdy network of shared correspondence, common political dreams, and righteous indignation at current events. During the lean years, when World

framed as defenders of modernity, see Gregory Teddy Eow, "Fighting a New Deal: Intellectual Origins of the Reagan Revolution, 1932–1952" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2007), 237–64. For a biography of Frank S. Meyer that does not mention Lane—even though the correspondence between them, archived at the Hoover Presidential Library, is voluminous and contains extended discussion of Meyer's ideas about conservatism—see Kevin J. Smant, *Principles and Heresies: Frank S. Meyer and the Shaping of the American Conservative Movement* (Wilmington, 2002). Most synthetic accounts of conservatism follow George H. Nash's work, which briefly mentions Paterson and Rand, but not Lane. See George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (1976; Wilmington, 1996). Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities throughout American History* (New Haven, 2009). Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007). David R. Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton, 2010).

⁴ Work on Lane exemplifies the dangers of focusing too exclusively on gender to explain ideas. Her libertarianism has been understood in terms of "pathology" or rooted in "the intense and troubled relationship between the mother and daughter" and "Their accumulated frustrations with each other." See Holtz, *Ghost in the Little House*, 328. Anita Clair Fellman, "Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane: The Politics of a Mother-Daughter Relationship," *Signs*, 15 (Spring 1990), 535–61, esp. 537. Interpretations such as these foreclose examination of the broad intellectual and cultural context of Lane's views.

War II patriotism pushed political dissent underground, this salon passed libertarian ideas from the Old Right to the New Right and brought together intellectuals with businessmen who, with funding and organization, helped craft their ideas into a popular movement.⁵

Yet Lane, Paterson, and Rand were far more than decorative figures presiding over polite company; the three women were widely acknowledged by the men they met as more politically astute and intellectually advanced. Lane, Paterson, and Rand pushed their correspondents toward a new hyperindividualism that gave the state no productive role in the economy and little positive role in society. They built this philosophy on the bedrock of nineteenth-century liberalism, modifying and updating the autonomous self for a new century. Their correspondents recognized the women's ideas as different from—and in many ways more satisfying than—those of intellectual luminaries such as Friedrich A. Hayek, the famous author of *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), or the libertarian economist Milton Friedman. Relying on persuasion, education, and relationship, their leadership would not survive the institutionalization of conservative intellectual life, nor would it be acknowledged in most histories of the movement. But by articulating, defining, and defending a radical philosophy of antistatism, they expanded the ideological borders of modern political thought. Failing to integrate Lane, Paterson, and Rand into the creation story of the modern Right has resulted in gaps in our understanding of how the movement formed, particularly in its early years, prior to the emergence of male-led institutions such as the *National Review*. This omission has minimized the conflict between radical individualists and those who saw a limited role for the state in social provision, and has also contributed to a sense that the conservative movement emerged from a postwar struggle with liberalism. Putting Lane, Paterson, and Rand back in the story might help us better understand both the fragmented nature of conservatism and its variegated roots in American history. At a moment when scholars are turning with increased intensity to the intellectual sources of free-market ideology, often figuring it as a transnational, cosmopolitan ideology created by elite male economists, Lane, Paterson, and Rand remind us that these ideas also had deep roots in the continental United States and circulated widely through newspapers, popular fiction, and women's magazines. As such, they underscore the origins of postwar conservatism in a world shaped not by suburbs, freeways, and a warfare state, but by agricultural crisis, a vanishing frontier, and self-made women on the make.⁶

Years before hatred of the New Deal brought them together, Lane, Paterson, and Rand had each forged a personal philosophy of individualism, rooted in a powerful drive

⁵ Caroline Winterer, "Is There an Intellectual History of Early American Women?," *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (April 2007), 173–90, esp. 187. Isabel Paterson to Ayn Rand, Nov. 30, 1945, box 151-13B, Ayn Rand Papers (Ayn Rand Archives, Irvine, Calif.).

⁶ Nineteenth-century liberalism is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down, and Lane, Paterson, and Rand's invocation of older ideals served to construct an ideological framework that simplified a complex history. Historians have identified contract freedom, self-ownership, and individual freedom as distinct elements of a broadly shared nineteenth-century world view, and that is how I use the term here, to underscore continuities with twentieth-century libertarianism. By contrast, David M. Levy, Sandra J. Peart, and Margaret Albert categorize Lane as an "individualist" rather than a liberal because of her attack on democracy. Lane, however, considered herself to be defending representative government as understood in nineteenth-century America, including state selection of U.S. senators (invalidated by the Seventeenth Amendment). For a work on nineteenth-century liberalism that emphasizes self-ownership, see Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012). For laissez-faire and liberalism, see the discussion of Edward Youmans and William

for autonomy and financial independence. The three shared numerous biographical similarities, from impoverished childhoods to early literary success. The only surviving child of Almanzo Wilder and Laura Ingalls (the plucky settler girl immortalized in the *Little House on the Prairie* children's book series), Rose Wilder Lane was born in Dakota Territory in 1886. When the arid plains failed to provide a living, the Wilders settled in Mansfield, Missouri, to raise their daughter. Still, Lane had done enough bumping around in covered wagons during her early years to feel that the frontier experience was part of her heritage, and she would later defend rural values against the encroachment of the administrative state. Paterson also grew up along the edges of settlement in a family that unsuccessfully sought to wrest a living from the frontier. She was born in 1886 on a remote island on the Canadian side of Lake Huron, but before long her family crossed into the United States, passing through Michigan, Utah, and other western territories. Like their contemporary Frederick Jackson Turner, Paterson and Lane understood the frontier and the prairie as the repository of authentic American values, and they would impart this belief to Rand, who grew up outside the United States. Unlike the other two women, Rand was an urban child, born as Alissa Rosenbaum in 1905, the eldest daughter of a prosperous Jewish family in St. Petersburg, Russia. The formative event of Alissa's childhood was the seizure by the Bolsheviks of her father's chemistry shop in 1918, an incident that plunged the family into poverty and left her with a lifelong suspicion of both the state and humanitarian moral sentiments. Aided by relatives in the United States, Alissa fled Russia in 1926, shedding her birth name for the more glamorous *nom de plume* Ayn Rand upon disembarking in the United States.⁷

As if on cue, Lane, Paterson, and Rand all embraced the storied freedoms of the New Woman that defined the early decades of the twentieth century. They shared similarities that were both superficial (bobbed haircuts and cigarettes) and deep (they charted careers as women newly freed from the conventions of their Victorian mothers). After a brief marriage that ended in divorce, Paterson headed to New York City, where she forged a notable career as a book critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, a post she assumed in 1924 and held for the next twenty-five years. Paterson's rise at the paper was remarkable, given that she began without connections, literary reputation, or formal education beyond a few years of grade school. Her column, "Turns with a Bookworm," pioneered a new hybrid form of writing about literature, mixing personal reflections, literary gossip,

Graham Sumner in Andrew Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War* (Cambridge, Eng., 2012), 63–74. Julian Zelizer urges historians to better capture the contested and divided nature of conservatism, while Kim Phillips-Fein suggests, "Instead of seeing a conservative movement springing from the ashes of World War II to counter a powerful liberal state, we might see a long tradition with deep historical roots, revitalized at different points in response to various challenges but nonetheless present throughout the century." See Julian E. Zelizer, "Reflections: Rethinking the History of American Conservatism," *Reviews in American History*, 38 (June 2010), 367–92. Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History*, 98 (Dec. 2011), 723–43, esp. 738. American ideas about capitalism are now understood as having global impact. See Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009). David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York, 2005). F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago, 1944).

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the summary of the early years of the three women's lives is taken from Holtz, *Ghost in the Little House*; Burns, *Goddess of the Market*; Cox, *Woman and the Dynamo*; and Anne Conover Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York, 2009). On the enduring impact of Frederick Jackson Turner's work, see John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays* (New York, 1994).



This 1923 photograph of Rose Wilder Lane was taken in Europe, possibly Albania, where she lived for much of the 1920s. *Courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum.*

and book reviews. Though she published eight novels, it was as a critic and taste maker that Paterson achieved her greatest success.⁸

Like Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane tried marriage and ended up instead with a divorce and an unexpected career as a writer. Though she wanted a child and was devastated after a traumatic miscarriage left her unable to bear children, she remembered being “as unhappy as anyone can possibly be” during most of her marriage. According to a later published account, she attempted suicide as the relationship disintegrated. In the wake of her breakup, Lane accepted a job with the *San Francisco Bulletin*, beginning her career as a professional writer. Her first novel, *Diverging Roads* (1919), and most of her short fiction were prototypical genre stories featuring working girls navigating the dilemmas of work and love. Her output varied wildly in subject and quality; in 1922 Lane was a

⁸ For a vivid portrait of the New Woman, see Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York, 2000). Lane dabbled in the radicalism Christine Stansell describes, and all three women were influenced by and in turn helped produce the images “reiterated and recycled so continuously in light fiction and social commentary that they took on independent weight and plausibility, announcing a widened spectrum of respectable femininity.” *Ibid.*, 29. Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York, 1977); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); Jean V. Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman: The Women’s Movement in America, 1875–1930* (Chicago, 2003). Paterson got her break after impressing superiors at the *New York Tribune*. Paterson’s column is noted in Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 79–80.



Isabel Paterson's career as a book reviewer had just begun when she posed for this photograph circa 1924. *Courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum.*

finalist for the prestigious O. Henry story award, but she also wrote hack biographies of Jack London, Henry Ford, and Charlie Chaplin, resulting in two threatened lawsuits for her liberties with biographical fact.⁹

Out of rocky personal lives Lane and Paterson crafted a remarkably similar vision of female independence, rooted in the rejection of marriage and motherhood. Although both were highly atypical in choosing to divorce and then not remarry, they framed their experiences in generational terms. In *Never Ask the End* (1933), Paterson's novel about two middle-aged female friends reunited in Europe, her protagonist was elegiac about the moment: "An army of girls, without banners, in mutiny . . . Going out of the home, each

⁹ Rose Wilder Lane, "I, Rose Wilder Lane, Am the Only Truly Happy Person I Know, and I Discovered the Secret of Happiness on the Day I Tried to Kill Myself," *Cosmopolitan*, 80 (June 1926), 42. Maureen Honey, ed., *Breaking the Ties that Bind: Popular Stories of the New Woman, 1915–1930* (Norman, 1992). Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895–1915* (Champaign, 2005). Rose Wilder Lane, *Diverging Lanes* (New York, 1919). Rose Wilder Lane, "Innocence," *Harper's Magazine*, 144 (April 1922), 577–84. The Jack London biography appeared in eight installments, beginning with Rose Wilder Lane, "Life and Jack London," *Sunset*, 39 (Oct. 1917), 17–20. Rose Wilder Lane, *Henry Ford's Own Story: How a Farmer Boy Rose to the Power That Goes with Many Millions yet Never Lost Touch with Humanity* (New York, 1917). *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* (Indianapolis, 1916).

alone, but multitudes at once. We didn't intend to go back, to be caught; we were leaving it behind forever. Child-bearing and drudgery and dependence . . . Just as we grew up, the door was open. Our mothers hadn't had the chance. But they told us to run for it. And we did." Writing more than a decade after her own break for freedom, Paterson emphasized that she had no regrets through the figure of Magda, her thinly veiled autobiographical protagonist: "she was glad that at least she had no children." Lane sounded a similarly triumphant note after her divorce, writing in *Cosmopolitan* in 1925:

We had tasted independence; under our wish to marry was the new wish to be free. Our independence had taught us the delights of a selfish life. We had learned, as our mothers in their fathers' and husbands' families had never learned, the use of the personal pronoun, first person, *singular*. . . . We were happy with our work and our freedom. We thought we would be even happier, married. We were not. So we went back to the happiness we had known before we were married. It was as simple as that.

If Lane's blithe summary glossed over the ordeal of her marriage, the note of individualism, "first person, *singular*," proved enduring. Freed of her husband, Lane launched herself on a series of adventures that took her to Washington, D.C., New York, and then finally to Europe, where she lived for much of the 1920s.¹⁰

Unlike the other two, Rand would marry, but crafted an unconventional marriage outside the boundaries of established gender roles. After immigrating to the United States, Rand made her way to Hollywood, where she worked a series of jobs in the film industry while hoping to make it as a screenwriter. Rand's unpublished fiction from this time shows her struggling to balance her longing for traditional romance with her drive for economic independence. Like Lane, she produced prototypical New Women genre stories, with a twist: quick witted and wealthy women rescue or dominate their male suitors. Before long, fact followed fiction when Rand married an aspiring actor who had trouble finding steady work. The determined and resourceful Rand quickly emerged as the primary breadwinner in her marriage, and the couple deliberately chose not to have children. As she settled into domestic life, Rand began to explore a more intellectual and philosophical basis for her individualism, turning with particular intensity to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.¹¹

That none of these three fiercely independent women commented at length on the Nineteenth Amendment, which had granted them equal political rights in 1920, reveals how apolitical their early lives were. Far more important were World War I and Prohibition. The outbreak of World War I left Paterson, according to her biographer, "so horrified that she had to stay home from work, physically sickened by the prospective loss of life." It was the aftermath of the war that most affected Lane, who traveled to Europe

¹⁰ Isabel Paterson, *Never Ask the End* (New York, 1933), 99, 255. Ellipses, a staple of Paterson's style, are in the original. Rose Wilder Lane, "If I Could Live My Life Over Again," *Cosmopolitan*, 78 (March 1925), 32–33. Emphasis in original. Rose Wilder Lane, *The Peaks of Shala: Being a Record of Certain Wanderings among the Hill-Tribes of Albania* (London, 1922). Diaries from her road trip have been published as Rose Wilder Lane and Helen Dore Boylston, *Travels with Zenobia: Paris to Albania by Model T Ford: A Journal*, ed. William Holtz (Columbia, Mo., 1983). Though she traveled and lived with a female companion for several years, from all evidence, Lane's friendships resembled the platonic female friendships that were a staple of the New Women fictional genre rather than the romantic and emotional partnerships described in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, 1 (Autumn 1975), 1–29.

¹¹ Family lore holds that Rand had an abortion early in her marriage. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made*, 128. Rand's New Women stories can be found in Leonard Peikoff, ed., *The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction* (New York, 1986). Her obsession with Friedrich Nietzsche surfaces in David Harriman, ed., *The Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York, 1999), esp. 20–48. See also Lester H. Hunt, "Thus Spake Howard Roark: Nietzschean Ideas in *The Fountainhead*," *Philosophy and Literature*, 30 (April 2006), 79–101.



This photograph of Alissa Rosenbaum was taken in Leningrad, Soviet Union, in the 1920s, before she changed her name to Ayn Rand. *Courtesy of the Ayn Rand Archives.*

under the auspices of the American Red Cross to help publicize the recovery. Living in Europe for most of the 1920s, Lane bypassed Prohibition as an issue. But the ban on liquor struck Paterson and Rand, both teetotalers by nature, as a pernicious violation of individual rights. Opposition to Prohibition both augured their later individualism and revealed their youthful embrace of cosmopolitan urban culture. This issue more than any other shaped their first political choices. Paterson supported New York governor Al Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt largely because they advocated repeal, and Rand likewise cast her first vote as a citizen for Roosevelt in 1932 for the same reason.¹²

Despite Paterson's and Rand's early embrace of Roosevelt, the New Deal marked a turning point in the intellectual evolution of all three women, transforming their individualism from a personal creed to an all-encompassing political faith. At first, survival in the wake of the depression's economic catastrophe was their paramount concern. Paterson weathered the storm better than most, managing to hold onto her regular column in the *New York Herald Tribune* even as her income plunged and she lost nearly \$30,000 in the stock market. At the same time, she met her greatest literary and commercial success with two novels featuring working women protagonists, *Never Ask the End* (1933) and *The Golden Vanity* (1934). Lane was not so fortunate. In 1928, after several years living in Albania, she moved back to her parent's farm in Missouri. It was a fateful choice that

¹² Cox, *Woman and the Dynamo*, 57, 111.

would shape American literature when she helped her mother write the Little House on the Prairie children's book series. But in the short term, the move home left Lane isolated, miserable, and broke. Meanwhile, Rand met with her greatest success to date when she sold her play *Night of January 16th* to a Broadway producer in 1934. She and her husband spent their savings to move from Hollywood to New York, but hard times hit when the play's production was delayed.¹³

The move to New York exposed Rand to Paterson's columns, which were becoming increasingly political as Paterson began to critique the New Deal, sounding frequent notes of fiscal conservatism. "Obviously," she wrote of unnamed "high-minded persons," "they don't believe the money for endowments comes from anywhere in particular; it just grows on trees, the same as tax money or borrowed money spent on government projects." The Federal Writers' Project, which underwrote a variety of literary efforts as part of New Deal efforts to stimulate employment, struck Paterson as a particularly egregious boondoggle. "How it is possible to believe literally in Santa Clause after a certain age," she wondered, using other columns to attack the American Writers Congress and the literary Left. The animosity was mutual. In a series of articles published in the *Nation*, Mary McCarthy and Margaret Marshall attacked Paterson's literary and social criticism as a "pathetic masquerade," and claimed that "ignorance is her fetish." As McCarthy detected, under Paterson's elliptical asides lay a political world view starkly at odds with the growing consensus that government action was needed to create economic growth and prosperity. And, indeed, Paterson believed that "the well being of the citizen exists in direct inverse ratio to the power of the state." Paterson was warming up for *The God of the Machine* (1943), her non-fiction treatise on history and politics.¹⁴

Paterson's politicization had a deep impact on Rand, although the two had not yet met. As an aspiring novelist, Rand was an avid reader of Paterson's columns, which would help her interpret the reaction to her own first novel, *We the Living* (1936). A fictionalized version of her bourgeois family's fall from grace in communist Russia, *We the Living* follows Kira, an independent engineer who spouts Nietzschean philosophy, dreams only of building beautiful, functional bridges, and breaks with her family to live with a man she loves. Distant from her family, sexually libertine, unmoved by social convention or worldly goods, Kira was an idealized version of Rand herself, and the book's plot a meditation on Rand's possible fate had she stayed in Russia. In the novel's tragic conclusion, Kira perishes while trying to cross the border into Latvia. The novel exhibits clear continuities with Rand's earlier unpublished fiction, but in *We the Living* Rand uses female independence to make a political point about the injustice and oppression of the Soviet system.¹⁵

Although she had not intended the novel as a commentary on the United States, Rand quickly discovered that her depiction of Russia had political valence in her new homeland. Left-leaning book reviewers found her eyewitness account of life under totalitarian rule to be "not a valuable document concerning the Russian experiment" and perhaps merely reflective of "a transition period in life of the nation." This reaction was eye-opening,

¹³ Isabel Paterson, *The Golden Vanity* (New York, 1934). *Night of January 16th* was first produced in 1934 as *Woman on Trial* and was later published in book form as Ayn Rand, *Night of January 16th* (New York, 1968).

¹⁴ Isabel Paterson, "Turns with a Bookworm," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 23, 1939, p. H14. Isabel Paterson, "Turns with a Bookworm," *ibid.*, July 9, 1939, p. H12. Mary McCarthy and Margaret Marshall, "Our Critics, Right or Wrong: II. The Anti-intellectuals," *Nation*, Nov. 6, 1935, p. 544. Isabel Paterson, "Turns with a Bookworm," *New York Herald Tribune*, Aug. 6, 1939, p. H11. Isabel Paterson, *The God of the Machine* (1943; New Brunswick, 1993).

¹⁵ Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (New York, 1936). For admiring commentary on the novel, see Robert Mayhew, ed., *Essays on Ayn Rand's We the Living* (Lanham, 2004).

Rand had expected to find “Pinks” in America, she later remembered, but also assumed “they did not matter in the least . . . that this was *the* capitalist country of the world, and by everything I could observe, Leftism or socialism was not an issue.” Shocked to find communist sympathizers among the nation’s leading newspapers and magazines, she began following current events and reading the papers daily. Before long, she linked her long-standing anticommunism to American politics. As she recounted to a friend in 1936: “You have no idea how radical and pro-Soviet New York is—particularly, as everyone admits, in the last three years. Perhaps Mr. Roosevelt had nothing to do with it, but it’s a funny coincidence, isn’t it?” Rand feared that communism, in the guise of Roosevelt-style liberalism, had already made a beachhead in her adopted land.¹⁶

From her vantage point amid the farmers of Missouri, Lane was reaching a similarly pessimistic conclusion. The move home had shattered Lane’s ideal of female independence and triggered a deep depression. Caught in an ongoing power struggle with her mother over finances, Lane mourned the life choices that had brought her back to her doorstep alone at mid-life. An article she wrote for *Ladies Home Journal* in 1936 was especially bleak: “My life has been arid and sterile at the core because I have been a human being instead of a woman, a wife,” she wrote, abandoning her earlier celebration of female autonomy. Lane eased her misery by mothering a teenaged runaway who came to her doorstep in search of food. And a trip through the Midwest with the *Saturday Evening Post* writer Gareth Garrett suggested a way to redeem this stark vision of gender-neutral humanity. Garrett, who was leading the *Saturday Evening Post*’s charge against the New Deal, was the author of *A Bubble That Broke the World* (1932), which blamed European and American bankers for the economic crisis. After interviewing farmers and seeing their desperate poverty, Lane became angry above all at the regimentation of the Agriculture Adjustment Act and other New Deal laws and regulations. Lane began to craft an explicit philosophy of individualism, synthesizing her reaction to the New Deal with her older belief in the power of liberty and independence.¹⁷

In 1936 Lane published “Credo” in the *Saturday Evening Post*, a manifesto that mimicked her earlier defense of female autonomy but was set within a wider social context and a darker metaphysics. This time around, the individual was condemned to be free, rather than choosing to be free: “independence is another name for slavery without security. This is a slavery in which one is one’s own master, bearing a double burden of toil and of responsibility.” Lane was in part hearkening back to an older ideal of landed independence, while emphasizing that such independence only came through hard work. Still, she emphasized, the American past contained lessons relevant to today: “The American pioneers phrased this clearly and bluntly. They said, ‘Root, hog, or die.’ There can be no third alternative for the shoat let out of the pen to go where he pleases and do what he likes. Individual liberty is individual responsibility.” Lane admitted independence and individualism were difficult choices, but she maintained they produced practical results.

¹⁶ A. S. P., “Russian Triangle,” *Cincinnati Times-Star*, July 25, 1936, n.p., 075-11x, Rand Papers; J. P. C., “Days of the Red Terror,” *Toronto Globe*, May 9, 1936, n.p., 073-04E, *ibid.* Ayn Rand interview no. 14 by Barbara Branden and Nathaniel Branden, March 3, 1961, transcript, p. 351, *ibid.* Quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 34. Emphasis in original. Rand to Ruth Morris, July 2, 1936, box 98-03C, *ibid.* Quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 38.

¹⁷ Rose Wilder Lane, “Woman’s Place Is in the Home,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, 53 (Oct. 1936), 96. Gareth Garrett, *A Bubble That Broke the World* (New York, 1932). The book, a compilation of *Saturday Evening Post* columns, received mostly negative reviews except for the plaudits from Paterson in Isabel Paterson, “Turns with a Bookworm,” *New York Herald Tribune*, June 26, 1932, p. 9. A selection of Gareth Garrett’s commentary is reprinted in Gareth Garrett, *Salvos against the New Deal: Selections from the Saturday Evening Post, 1933–1940*, ed. Bruce Ramsey (Caxton, 2002).

Surveying the history of the United States, with particular attention to the depression of the 1880s, she concluded that the United States had grown wealthier ever since that downturn. The Great Depression, then, could be understood as a similar blip in history. Warning against the collectivism of Europe, Lane argued it would be foolish to abandon American traditions, because “individualism tends to a leveling of wealth, a destroying of economic inequality . . . [and] has also distributed wealth to an unprecedented and elsewhere unparalleled degree.” In this vision of history, hardship was to be expected but should be weathered without complaint. At the same time, individualism was linked to the egalitarian possibility of riches and independence for all. Lane’s short article reprised the stoicism of nineteenth-century liberalism while foreshadowing the market utopianism of the postwar era. As such, it was enthusiastically hailed by the *Saturday Evening Post’s* conservative readership and reprinted in a popular pamphlet, *Give Me Liberty*.¹⁸

The turn to individualism gave Lane a new lease on life and soon infused her fiction. As scholars have documented, Lane played a pivotal role in the success of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s children’s books, the first of which was published in 1932. Under Lane’s deft hand, Wilder’s stiff manuscripts were transformed into best sellers that would soon ease the financial burdens of the family. Scholars have also shown how Lane began to weave her individualism through the stories, inserting political commentary into a small-town Fourth of July oration and excising anything about support provided to her blind Aunt Mary by the territory of South Dakota. Researchers have been less interested in the two novels Lane authored under her own hand during this time, *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933) and *Free Land* (1938). Those two books share a similar plotline of newlyweds surviving a harsh winter on the plains, and they borrow liberally from the same material that informed Ingalls’s work. They also chart Lane’s emerging political turn to individualism. In the first novel, a young couple survives a hard winter through pluck and fortitude. *Free Land*, published five years later, covers much the same territory, but this time Lane criticizes railroads, eastern land speculators, banks, and government policies that created the illusion of “free land.” Usurprisingly, given Lane’s roots and the company she was keeping, some of these evildoers might have stepped right out of Populist political oratory. In fact, Lane remembered being “an ardent if uncomprehending Populist” in her youth, and by updating this trope with a new villain—the meddling federal government—this book can be understood as an early stage in Populism’s “migration from Left to Right” that Michael Kazin has traced.¹⁹

Lane’s views continued to evolve in response to the New Deal as she made a break from the family homestead. In 1935 she left the farm after tensions with her mother came to a head, although the two continued their literary collaboration from a distance. After living briefly in New York City, the royalties from *Free Land* gave Lane enough financial independence to buy a homestead of her own in Connecticut. Moving out of her mother’s orbit helped stabilize Lane’s emotions and sense of self. But just as important to this trans-

¹⁸ Rose Wilder Lane, “Credo,” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 7, 1936, pp. 30, 34, 30. Rose Wilder Lane, *Give Me Liberty* (New York, 1936).

¹⁹ William Holtz has done the most thorough comparison of the original manuscripts by Ingalls and the changes introduced by Wilder. Holtz, *Ghost in the Little House*, 379–86; Anita Clair Fellman, *Little House, Long Shadow: Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Impact on American Culture* (Columbia, Mo., 2008), esp. 69–118. Rose Wilder Lane, *Let the Hurricane Roar* (New York, 1933), 99–100. Rose Wilder Lane, *Free Land* (1938; Lincoln, 1966), 7, 107, 230. A positive review is Rebecca Pitts, “Sod Cabins,” *New Republic*, May 18, 1938, pp. 53–54. Rose Wilder Lane, *An Autobiographical Sketch of Rose Wilder Lane* (New York, 1935). Michael Kazin writes, “The vocabulary of grassroots rebellion now served to thwart and reverse social and cultural change rather than to promote it.” Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York, 1995), 4.

formation was her identification and defense of individualism as a valid political position, which allowed her to embrace and celebrate her independence, as she had when younger. At the same time, Lane began to present herself in journalistic accounts as a mother of two boys, a reference to the adolescent boy (and his sibling) she had informally adopted in Missouri.²⁰

Her relationships with her mother and “sons” were difficult and marked by recurrent conflict, but they were prized connections for Lane, whose earlier friendships had begun to fray under the pressure of her new political views. A long-standing connection with Dorothy Parker, for example, faltered in 1939 over a contretemps involving the Soviet defector Walter Krivitsky. Lane had helped Isaac Don Levine, a noted anticommunist, publish several articles by Krivitsky in the *Saturday Evening Post*. When Parker publicly questioned Krivitsky’s credibility, Lane sided with Levine. She and Parker exchanged heated letters, with Lane declaring dramatically at the height of the conflict, “My friendship with you has been genuine since 1920. It ends now.” Parker refused to accept the formal break, but their friendship was largely over. Lane also became a target of the liberal magazine the *New Republic*, which criticized an article she wrote for a local magazine about high wages for labor and mocked an interview she gave to the *New York World-Telegram*. Lane’s politics, like Paterson’s, were pushing her to the fringes of the literary world that had once been her professional and personal community.²¹

Her new friendship with Paterson, however, was built upon a converging political outlook as both sought answers to the economic crisis of the age. The two women had known of each other at least since 1925, when Paterson mentioned Lane in a column, and reconnected when Lane moved east. Later, Paterson would downplay their bond as she grew close to Rand, describing Lane as a slightly foolish older woman whom she inevitably bested in argument with “marvelous and unanswerable” retorts. In truth, although their relationship was marked by disagreement, the two were both comrades-in-arms and friends. In her diary, Lane recorded a companionable evening spent with “I.M.P.” (Paterson) listening to the 1940 election returns and debating politics. They debated the significance of the moment, with Lane concluding that “Loss of liberty ends the Industrial Revolution” while Paterson feared “the power will explode. In war.” Lane wondered: “What do we lack, that we lose freedom?” Talking late into the night as the election unfolded, Lane and Paterson were trading ideas and thinking out loud.²²

Roosevelt’s election to a third term ushered Rand into this ongoing conversation. Prior to the election, Rand had become an enthusiastic volunteer for Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, who she believed would reverse the New Deal, support private enterprise, and keep the United States out of war. After Willkie was defeated, Rand hoped

²⁰ For Lane’s self-presentation as a mother, see “Author’s Criticism of Social Security Brings FBI Probe,” *Washington Star*, Aug. 9, 1943, clipping, “Federal Bureau of Investigation, Rose Wilde Lane Investigation, 1943” folder, box 5, Rose Wilder Lane Papers (Hoover Library). Lane also supported an Albanian youth and later considered herself grandmother to Roger MacBride, who would become her executor and Libertarian party candidate for president in 1976. On Lane supporting an Albanian youth, see Holtz, *Ghost in the Little House*, 184. On Lane’s relationship with MacBride, see Roger Lea MacBride, “Introduction,” in *Lady and the Tycoon: The Best of Letters between Rose Wilder Lane and Jasper Crane*, ed. Roger Lea MacBride (Caldwell, 1973).

²¹ Rose Wilder Lane to Dorothy Parker, June 1, 1939, in *Dorothy Thompson and Rose Wilder Lane: Forty Years of Friendship, Letters, 1921–1960*, ed. William V. Holtz (Columbia, Mo., 1991), 157. Heywood Broun, “Houseworkers of the World Unite!,” *New Republic*, July 6, 1938, pp. 248–49. Lane responded indignantly in a letter to the editor. See Rose Wilder Lane, “Mrs. Lane Classifies Herself,” *ibid.*, July 27, 1938, p. 336. “Mrs. Lane’s Sitdown Strike,” *ibid.*, April 24, 1944, p. 533.

²² Rand interview no. 14, p. 367, quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 78. Rose Wilder Lane Diary, Nov. 6, 1940, item 67, box 24, Diaries and Notes Series, Lane Papers.



Isabel Paterson is shown here seated next to the *New York Herald Tribune* editor Burton Rascoe at the 1933 Authors of the Year Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. Courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum.

to start a political organization that would centralize opposition to the New Deal, and she asked Paterson to join. Paterson declined. According to Rand, Paterson telephoned her a few weeks later with an invitation to her home in Connecticut. It was an “enormous jump in the relationship,” as Rand recalled, and an unusual move indeed given Paterson’s curmudgeonly temperament. But the friendship stuck, cemented by a long philosophical conversation that lasted until morning light. Typically dominant in her relationships, Rand was impressed by Paterson’s wide-ranging knowledge and was willing to play the role of eager student. She became a regular at Paterson’s office during weekly proofing sessions of the *New York Herald Tribune*’s “Books” section, and afterward would ply her with questions about American history and politics. Rand told her later: “I learned *from you* the historical and economic aspects of Capitalism, which I knew before only in a general way.” For the rest of her career, she would recommend Paterson’s *God of the Machine* to her fans. Tracing the first connections between Lane and Rand is more difficult. Paterson’s letters make frequent mention of Lane, suggesting that Rand knew her. They also make clear that Lane figured in their debates, although Paterson usually denigrated Lane’s ideas. The published record, however, shows considerable cross-fertilization between all three women as they worked on books that would codify their newfound political ideas.²³

The moment was particularly fitted for extended intellectual work, given that the entry of the United States into World War II brought a sharp halt to most organized political

²³ Rand interview no. 14, p. 365, quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 75. Rand to Paterson, May 17, 1948, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Michael S. Berliner (New York, 1995), 215. Emphasis in original. Rand would later accuse Paterson of plagiarism, though most scholars consider the allegation meritless. See Cox, *Woman and the Dynamo*, 307–11; and Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 88, 130.

activity on the right. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Rand's erstwhile collaborators abandoned their shared plans for a group opposed to Roosevelt, a shift that was broadly representative. Historians have ably documented the discontent with the New Deal that bubbled under the surface of the so-called red decade, from the American Liberty League to the 1938 congressional elections to the early Chicago school. During the 1930s, critiques of Roosevelt in the popular press were not uncommon, from the writings of John T. Flynn to the *Chicago Tribune* to the *Saturday Evening Post*. The outbreak of war quelled these nascent stirrings against Roosevelt, in the process opening new opportunities for writers such as Lane, Paterson, and Rand to cultivate a now-neglected audience through their fiction and personal contacts. As public opinion shifted to wartime patriotism, writers such as Nock and Garrett, who had been firing regular fusillades against the New Deal, found it impossible to publish. Garrett lost his berth at the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1942 and was unable to find a comparable platform, effectively silencing a powerful voice against the New Deal. Once widely respected as the editor of the 1920s literary magazine the *Freeman*, Nock had seen his literary reputation decline steadily since he published *Our Enemy, the State* in 1935. In 1943 Nock confessed, "I got letters from strangers urging me to come out against collectivism, and I have to tell them that there is no place to publish—for there is none." In the changed climate of opinion, those still willing to publicly attack the president found themselves co-opted by protofascist denizens of the far Right.²⁴

While Lane, Paterson, and Rand all looked askance at the U.S. involvement in the war, only Lane's views had occasionally veered into organized isolationism. "The death blow to liberty on earth would be America's fighting any war," she told Parker in 1938, and in 1939 she testified before Congress in favor of the proposed Ludlow amendment to the Constitution, which would have required a popular vote before a declaration of war. Both Paterson and Rand were mildly isolationist, but, like Lane, seemed resigned to the conflict once war broke out. They said nothing publicly and little privately about the war. Instead, they focused on the books that would establish them as leading intellectual forces on the right in the 1940s and beyond: *The Discovery of Freedom* (1943), *God of the Machine* (1943), and *The Fountainhead* (1943).²⁵

Both reactions against the prevailing progressive intellectual climate and a foreshadowing of the emerging conservative world view, the books can be usefully read as a trilogy that advances a series of interwoven arguments about individualism, morality, and the proper role of government. Lane, Paterson, and Rand resisted the progressive redefinition of self, insisting instead that individuals were not socially conditioned, interdependent, and shaped by larger forces, but were self-generating sources of energy who required only freedom to reach their highest potential. They fell back on a nineteenth-century vision

²⁴ Eow, "Fighting a New Deal." James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933–1939* (Lexington, Ky., 1967). George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934–1940* (Boston, 1962). Paula Baker, "Liberty and Property: Defending Classical Liberalism in the 1930s," n.d., unpublished paper (in Jennifer Burns's possession). Albert Jay Nock, *Our Enemy, the State* (New York, 1935). Gregory Eow describes the book as "a pastiche of the works of Henry George, Franz Oppenheimer, and Jose Ortega y Gasset" in Eow, "Fighting a New Deal," 207. Nock to Edmund C. Evans and Ellen Winsor, April 6, 1943, in *Letters from Albert Jay Nock*, ed. Garrison, 170–71. Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 58. For a photograph of Lane testifying before Congress, see "Rose Wilder Lane Says Ludlow Resolution Is Needed as Check on Government," May 10, 1939, *Library of Congress*, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/hec2009013362/>.

²⁵ Lane to Parker, Oct. 15, 1938, in *Dorothy Thompson and Rose Wilder Lane*, ed. Holtz, 147. Rose Wilder Lane, *The Discovery of Freedom: Man's Struggle against Authority* (1943; San Francisco, 1993); Paterson, *God of the Machine*; Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (1943; New York, 1993).

of laissez-faire in which autonomous individuals working for their own benefit harmoniously shaped the good society. But at the same time their books also advanced a distinctly twentieth-century vision of the state as destructive, dangerous, even evil. In their work, government does little except take away freedom (Lane), squander energy (Paterson), or crush genius (Rand). For this reason, Lane, Paterson, and Rand would reject not only the reformist liberalism of the New Deal but also almost any government intervention in the economy, creating an individualist philosophy that stopped just short of anarchy.²⁶

Paterson led the charge with *The God of the Machine*, which presented an original theory of political development predicated on the application of physical laws to human societies. Paterson grafted principles of engineering and physics onto human history: “In the social organization, man is the dynamo, in his productive capacity. Government is an end-appliance, and a dead end in respect of the energy it uses.” Yet as her book’s title indicates, *God of the Machine* was far from a mechanistic disquisition on politics, for Paterson identified a “moral order in the universe”—a God in the machine. According to Paterson, the United States was the first nation to recognize the individual as dynamo and to design an architecturally sound political system that incorporated this moral truth. But the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Amendments, which removed state control of the franchise, imposed an income tax, and established the popular election of senators, upset the carefully designed architectural structure of the country. If Americans did not respect the original form of the Constitution, she argued, the nation would fall like Greece and Rome.²⁷

Paterson’s stark duality between productive man and “prohibitive” government lay at the base of her politics and her radical conception of individualism. Paterson argued that government’s only function was to replicate the “individual inhibitory faculty.” It could not generate energy, which only individuals could do. Used to protect private property, check aggressors, and punish lawbreakers, government laid the very foundation of civilization. But when it overstepped these boundaries, government inhibited production, with dire consequences. Welfare programs such as Social Security might seem innocuous, but to Paterson they exacted a hidden toll on production that would become obvious only when it was too late. In Paterson’s rendering, the individual-as-dynamo was at once capable of infinite production and deeply vulnerable to the surrounding social structure. This conception loaned a decided brittleness to Paterson’s view of society and economics. Her contemporaries spoke of laissez faire and classical economics as outdated ideas no longer applicable to modern life or the crisis of the depression. But Paterson believed that limited government was a transcendent principle. To her, the economic downturn was part of just another economic cycle, no different than the panics and crashes she had already lived through. It was certainly no reason to change the delicate balance between individual and society.²⁸

Idiosyncratic, erudite, erratic, at times brilliant and at other points maddeningly dogmatic, *God of the Machine* adumbrated a number of themes that would become dominant in libertarian thought. The engineering idiom, a product of Paterson’s unique mind, gained little traction. But what lay behind that idiom—her own blend of eco-

²⁶ Their writing represents an early example of the shift Daniel Rodgers has traced from “conceptions of human nature . . . thick with context, social circumstance, institutions, and history” to those “that stressed choice, agency, performance, and desire.” Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), 3.

²⁷ Paterson, *God of the Machine*, 82, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 85, 87.

nomics, religion, and natural law—was a powerful combination that would become constitutive of the broader conservative movement. Many other of Paterson's key assumptions, too, would become axiomatic for later libertarians and conservatives, particularly her emphasis on private property as the sole grounding of liberty and her depiction of government as a negative force that could only reduce, rather than spur economic production. In the short term, its central concept of the dynamo deeply influenced both Lane and Rand, so that each of their books acted as a force multiplier for Paterson's ideas.

Lane's 1943 book, *The Discovery of Freedom*, aped Paterson's by identifying individual human effort as the "dynamo," or vital energy, that animated all society, but she offered a psychological rather than structural explanation of political authority. Lane moved quickly from the fact of energy to its social implications: "You alone are responsible for your every act; no one else can be. This is the nature of human energy; individuals generate it, and control it . . . Every human being, *by his nature*, is free." This truth came with a challenge that many preferred to evade, instead delegating their freedom to the pagan idea of "Authority." Lane rooted man's need for "Authority" in his childhood experiences of helplessness and dependency, and she argued that religion and higher culture could teach man the truth that they are indeed free.²⁹

This identification of childlike dependence as the root of political authority can be seen as a vestige of Lane's ongoing struggle for independence from her mother, but it is worth noting that childhood was also a freighted concept for Paterson and Rand. Later in life, Rand remembered fondly a girlhood school composition on the theme "childhood is the worst period of one's life." In *Cosmopolitan*, Lane echoed this idea, explaining, "I was not a happy child. Few children are happy. The myth of happy childhood is created by adults." And one of Paterson's fictional characters made a similar point: "I'm certain that what ailed me was that I was bored into fits, having to be a baby. I was bored most of my childhood."³⁰

For all three women, childhood symbolized a dangerous state of powerlessness and dependency. To criticize childhood, then, was to claim independence and autonomy, to reject sentimentality and by extension the role of motherhood. Childhood was also a convenient stand-in for any kind of government action that could be construed as either maternal or paternal. "Anyone who says that economic security is a human right, has been too much babied," wrote Lane sternly, linking the contemporary desire for security to both childhood and childishness, or a refusal to assume maturity. Instead of childhood, Lane preferred "the brotherhood of man," a key concept she found essential to individualism. Brotherhood and freedom came together in a properly functioning free economy that fostered the interlinked practice of exchange between equals.³¹

Despite her heavy reliance on familial metaphors, Lane said little about women in *The Discovery of Freedom*, in sharp contrast with her fiction, which almost invariably portrayed frontier wives as the most productive and efficient members of the household. In her nonfiction, following Paterson's lead, she seemed content to subsume women into the larger unit of the family. Paterson's occasional reference to the "household dynamo"

²⁹ Lane, *Discovery of Freedom*, xx. Emphasis in original. Lane had also used energy as metaphor in fiction, *Henry Ford's Own Story*. But conversations with Paterson seemed to have further developed Lane's idea of energy as a form of social power. Lane, *Discovery of Freedom*, xxi–xxii.

³⁰ Rand interview no. 4, by Branden and Branden, Dec. 28, 1960, transcript, unpaginated, Rand Papers. Quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 11. Lane, "I, Rose Wilder Lane," 42. Paterson, *Never Ask the End*, 95.

³¹ Lane, *Discovery of Freedom*, 60, xxii.

made clear that she considered most women's work (unlike hers or Lane's) a contribution to some larger household economy. For Paterson, women's work was guided by the same engineering principles as men's, but only the household figured in the political schema. Lane's choice of the gender specific word *brotherhood* reinforced this idea. Lane and Paterson had left behind the free and easy working girls of their fiction. The autonomous individual of libertarian political theory would be a male, or at least a head of household unfettered by family obligation.³²

Rand brought this "dynamo" to life through the figure of Howard Roark, a strong-willed, independent architect who refuses to compromise his designs for popularity or worldly success. On the surface a story about Roark's travails and triumphs, *The Fountainhead* is also a moral parable that teaches about the need for independence, self-sufficiency, and freedom from government. Rand crowed to a reader: "When you read it, you'll see what an indictment of the New Deal it is, what it does to the 'humanitarians' and what effect it could have on the next election—although I never mention the New Deal by name." Like Paterson and Lane, Rand argued that artistic progress came only from individual genius, even in a collaborative profession such as architecture. Rand also went further than Paterson and Lane in coding individualism as specifically male. Most of Rand's female characters are parasitic: smothering, manipulative mothers, feckless social workers, and unreadable novelists. Her distasteful male characters exhibit dreaded feminine characteristics, and her hero, Howard Roark, has no mother at all.³³

The transition from the independent Kira of *We the Living* to the baleful women of *The Fountainhead* is striking. Rand's assault on all things feminine was also linked to her rejection of humanitarianism, which she identified as female, and to her theory of ethical selfishness, embodied in a hypermasculine hero. Drawing on her earlier reading of Nietzsche and her long-standing ambition to create an individualistic ethics, Rand intended *The Fountainhead* to demonstrate the practicability of a new moral system in which self-interest was the primary standard of good. As a corollary, altruism must be considered evil. Though Rand would later define altruism with some precision, in *The Fountainhead* it shaded off into conformism and political liberalism. Rand's most odious characters are socialist intellectuals and government social workers. If the message were not clear enough, Roark dynamites an empty government housing project in the novel's climactic scene.

The Discovery of Freedom, *The God of the Machine*, and *The Fountainhead*, were, at first, disappointments for their ambitious authors. While her ghostwritten children's books were greeted with critical acclaim and rising sales, Lane's *Discovery of Freedom* made little impression. Frustrated, she turned on Paterson for "acting with the pinks" and failing to promote her book more enthusiastically in her "Turns with a Bookworm" column. Paterson may have minimized Lane's book because it was a competitor to hers; more likely, she understood the limitations of Lane's unwieldy text. Lane knew how to play with character, drama, plot, and description to craft works that drew readers into ideological

³² Indeed, many of the Little House on the Prairie books critique paternal authority; Pa is always making poor decisions that cause his family harm. This theme is also prevalent in Lane, *Let the Hurricane Roar*; and Lane, *Free Land*. By making the autonomous individual of libertarianism male, Lane and Paterson returned to the pervasive nineteenth-century assumption that citizens were autonomous males unencumbered physically or economically by family responsibility. Barbara Young Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865–1920* (New York, 2001), 151.

³³ Rand to DeWitt Emery, May 17, 1943, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Berliner, 73. Rand, *Fountainhead*. Rand's misogyny is discussed in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 45; and Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* (University Park, 1999).

sympathy even as they entertained, but *Discovery of Freedom* played to none of her strengths. Repetitive, simplistic, and plodding, the book lacks the personal detail and compelling voice that propelled Lane's fiction and short articles. Likewise, the epigrammatic asides and dry humor that enlivened Paterson's newspaper columns proved ill-suited to a book-length treatise. As fellow New Deal opponent Nock warned readers in an otherwise-favorable review, Paterson's dense and difficult *God of the Machine* "must be taken by sips." Of the three books, only *The Fountainhead* could be termed a success, earning Rand both a lucrative movie contract and a glowing review in the *New York Times* that praised her book as "the only novel of ideas written by an American woman." Her literary reputation would soon eclipse that of Lane and Paterson.³⁴

What Lane and Paterson lacked in public profile, however, they compensated for by their willingness to make personal contact with readers. Although they were no longer writing specifically about gender, Lane, Paterson, and Rand now began to enact a form of intellectual leadership that drew upon their social identities as women, acting as mentors, educators, and tutors, both to each other and to the readers of their books. By war's end, Lane, Paterson, and Rand had developed a shared network of pedagogical relationships with prominent businessmen, journalists, and politicians who had written in praise of their books. Established through letters, these connections could span the country and even the globe. The owner of the Texas-based Roberts Seed Company mused darkly about the future to Paterson: "How are we going to keep the American people thinking on real American principles with all of our neighbors deluded with Marxism?" He thought that Paterson and Lane might be one solution, telling Paterson, "I have thoroughly enjoyed my correspondence with Rose Lane. She has taught me a lot, and I read her letters continuously, over and over." As it turned out, the authority Lane, Paterson, and Rand wielded as published authors was only the beginning of their influence on the nascent libertarian networks of the mid-1940s. Equally important were the acolytes they tutored and the lengthy philosophical correspondences they maintained with admiring executives. Ironically enough, Lane, Paterson, and Rand helped their correspondents feel they were not isolated individuals, but rather participants in a wider intellectual community.³⁵

Working in close collaboration, Lane, Paterson, and Rand knit together the slowly developing libertarian subculture, frequently introducing like-minded correspondents to one another and commenting behind the scenes on proposed organizations and publications. Lane was the first to begin speaking about a "libertarian movement," thus articulating the importance of an intellectual and social community at a time when practical political achievements seemed out of reach. She even provided the impetus for one of the first libertarian organizations. Leonard Read, the head of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and later a key libertarian organizer, had been so inspired by her 1936 article "Credo" that he and a few friends formed a new group, the Pamphleteers, to republish Lane's work. In 1946 the Pamphleteers would publish *Anthem*, a short novel by Rand. A network of New Deal opponents began to form, with Lane and Rand as its first house intellectuals. Even the dyspeptic Paterson could be an important connector. She was among the first of their circle to meet Read shortly after his conversion to the "freedom philosophy." After an introductory lunch, Paterson pronounced Read "good stuff" and introduced him to the former DuPont execu-

³⁴ Paterson to Rand, Oct. 4, 1943, box 151-13B, Rand Papers. A. J. Nock, "God of the Machine by Isabel Paterson," *National Economic Council Review of Books*, June 15, 1943, p. 1. Lorine Pruette, "Battle against Evil," *New York Times Book Review*, May 16, 1943, p. 7.

³⁵ Mr. Roberts to Paterson, Aug. 13, 1945, box 3, Paterson Papers.

tive Jasper Crane and the journalist John Chamberlain. With Crane's backing, Read soon established the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), the first libertarian think tank.³⁶

Lane, Paterson, and Rand consistently pushed their listeners beyond the moderate conservatism of the times, emphasizing the need for new, consistent principles of *laissez-faire* and limited government. The urgency and purity of their antistatist critique took their mostly male readers by surprise. "This is not a book, this is a philosophy of history, a treatise on sociology, a political program and, above all, an intellectual shampoo that is quite electrifying," wrote one reader of *God of the Machine*. John Chamberlain, a journalist for the *New York Times* and *Fortune* magazine, remembered Lane, Paterson, and Rand as marking a turning point in his ideological evolution: "These books made it plain that if life was to be something more than a naked scramble for government favors, a new attitude toward the producer must be created." All three texts worked together in a sort of libertarian trifecta that accelerated his drift away from socialism. Still, Paterson found she had work left to do on Chamberlain. He explained to Paterson that he did not like Social Security but if social insurance was to exist, it was better for people to pay their own way. "I said only, if he conceded that, he had conceded *everything*—including war, pestilence, and famine," Paterson wrote to Rand.³⁷

The radical arguments of Lane, Paterson, and Rand staked out ground explicitly different from other contemporary defenders of capitalism, including F. A. Hayek, whose 1944 *Road to Serfdom* appeared moderate in comparison. The Ohio congressman Frederick C. Smith preferred *God of the Machine*, telling Paterson, "Hayek's 'The Road to Serfdom' contains some very fine thinking, but when I came to the place in his book where he attempts to reconcile 'social security' with liberty, I was through with Hayek." By contrast, "Your work has powerfully intrigued me and I am not so sure but what it has captivated my imagination. I cannot find a flaw in it, something I always carefully look for in reading any book." Although often remembered as a strident conservative, Hayek carved out a number of areas where it was legitimate for the state to intervene in markets, including education and social insurance. For Rand, these exceptions to the philosophy of limited government made Hayek "real poison," she wrote to Lane. Just like the businessman who preferred Paterson to Hayek because Hayek endorsed Social Security, Rand considered Hayek a false conservative because he believed it was legitimate for government to provide limited social welfare services. Rand also believed Hayek failed to understand the central point made by Lane, Paterson, and herself: economic activity was not a zero-sum game, and production must come before distribution. In one passage from *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek spoke of competition for available resources. "They don't compete for the available resources—they create the resources," Rand scoffed in an angry note in the margin of her copy. "Here's the socialist thinking again."³⁸

³⁶ Lane to Jasper Crane, Jan. 22, 1947, in *Lady and the Tycoon*, ed. MacBride, 12. On Leonard Read's importance to organized libertarianism, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York, 2009). Lane, Rand, and Paterson were a step forward for Read, whose Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had published work by the eugenicist economist Thomas Nixon Carver praising Adolf Hitler's sterilization policies. Thomas Nixon Carver, *How Can There Be Full Employment after the War?* (Los Angeles, 1945). Paterson to Rand, Dec. 15, 1943, box 4, Paterson Papers. Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 29; Chamberlain, *Life with the Printed Word*, 136.

³⁷ Geoffrey Brown to Henry R. Fuller, July 31, 1945, box 7, Paterson Papers. Chamberlain, *Life with the Printed Word*, 136. Paterson to Rand, Feb. 2, 1944, box 4, Paterson Papers.

³⁸ Frederick C. Smith to Paterson, March 3, 1948, box 7, Paterson Papers. Rand to Lane, Aug. 21, 1946, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Berliner, 308. Robert Mayhew, ed., *Ayn Rand's Marginalia: Her Critical Comments on the Writings of over 20 Authors* (Oceanside, 1995), 150.

Lane detected a similar problem in the thinking of Jasper Crane, the retired DuPont executive who, under Lane's tutelage, would become a critical funder of libertarian causes. In his first letter to Lane, Crane made an offhand reference to "restraint of trade by business." This brought a blast from Lane, arguing that the antitrust laws were "not Law" but "a substitution of personal State control . . . tyranny . . . for Law." The letter must have impressed Crane, because he invited Lane to visit him in Wilmington, Delaware, where he and Sun Oil's J. Howard Pew tried to convince her to author a "treatise on liberty." Lane declined but offered to act as a "gadfly" for others who might undertake the project, foreshadowing the work she would later do for the William Volker Fund, a libertarian foundation that supported the academic careers of Hayek and his mentor Ludwig von Mises. Though she was no longer writing for pay—claiming she could not stand to pay taxes to a government she despised—Lane churned out lengthy letters to Crane. Their correspondence of more than twenty years would eventually total over four thousand pages. As Chamberlain described it to Paterson, "if any single writer had a dominant effect on Crane, it was Rose Wilder Lane. He is always quoting her." Crane relied on Lane to guide his foray into political organizing, soliciting her advice about his ideas and projects.³⁹

Collectively, Lane, Paterson, and Rand acted as ideological enforcers, vigilantly patrolling the borders of the movement. Few politicians met their standards. "The big three women in those days were Ayn and Rose Lane and Isabel Patterson," remembered Richard Cornuelle, who was later the president of the Volker Fund. "Rose used to go and talk about dead rats," he said, "that you'd bake a gorgeous, succulent cherry pie and cut into it and there in the middle of it would be a dead rat. She thought that [Republican senator] Robert Taft supporting federal aid to education was such a dead rat. And we really had very little tolerance for people who wouldn't buy the position whole, or the position as we saw it." Riding high on their status as published authors, they enjoyed exercising authority over their male admirers. Lane boasted to Rand about her correspondence with the syndicated columnist George Peck: "He has sent me three rewrites of a piece (which he began by being very proud of) paralleling Government with the umpire of a baseball game, the teams being Labor and Management. I finally wrote him an eight-page single space letter, typewriter size paper, a primer lesson in history and political economy. Silence for ten days; today a note saying, When I read your letter I tore up the baseball piece." To Lane, the idea of an official "umpire" for economic life only served to justify the reforms and interventions of the New Deal. Through their correspondence, Peck too came to question the idea of government intervention.⁴⁰

While agreeing that capitalism was the only economic and social system compatible with individualism, Lane, Paterson, and Rand poured forth scorn on actual capitalists. They did this in part because of their belief that businessmen had sold out their principles in cooperating with the New Deal. Much of this anticapitalist sentiment, though, came from Paterson, who nursed a bitterness toward a publishing world that had fallen to collectivism. To Rand, Paterson recounted the tale of lunch with Leonard Read: "Then the question arose about getting American ideas printed, and Mr. Read said something about

³⁹ Jasper Crane's role in organized conservatism, nationally and internationally, is coming into focus as historians analyze the funding and scholarly networks of the modern Right. See Kim Phillips-Fein, "Business Conservatives and the Mont Pèlerin Society," in *Road from Mont Pèlerin*, ed. Mirowski and Plehwe, 280–301. Crane to Lane, March 20, 1946, in *Lady and the Tycoon*, ed. MacBride, 1–2; Lane to Crane, March 22, June 9, 1946, *ibid.*, 2–3, 5. MacBride, "Introduction," xiii. Chamberlain to Paterson, [ca. 1953], box 7, Paterson Papers.

⁴⁰ Richard Cornuelle interview by Scott McConnell, Dec. 8, 1996, transcript, p. 8, Ayn Rand Oral History Project, Rand Papers. Lane to Rand, Aug. 24, 1946, box 142-LAX, *ibid.*

not knowing a great deal about the matter; and I said I did not suppose he would, because the Chamber of Commerce never put out anything that wouldn't be quite suitable for publication in the *New Masses* or the *Daily Worker* . . . this will give you a faint idea of the light chit-chat at that lunch." Paterson's ire at capitalists also reflected the targets at hand: often, it was prominent capitalists who were most interested in her work. Her correspondents during this time included the budding intellectual Russell Kirk, then an obscure serviceman but later the celebrated author of *The Conservative Mind* (1953), former president Herbert Hoover, and conservative business leaders such as J. Howard Pew and DuPont's Crane.⁴¹

Paterson's grievances often undercut her effectiveness as an ideological mentor. She became enraged, for example, when Crane suggested that giving away copies of her book might help the cause. "The greatest difficulty I encounter is getting business men to think like business men!" she wrote in a testy letter reminding Crane that production was fundamental. Another of Paterson's admirers, Christy Borth, was so taken with *God of the Machine* that he attempted his own book along the same lines, *Masters of Mass Production*. Borth, a Detroit journalist and the director of the Automotive Council for War Production, had done his part to spread Paterson's ideas, inserting a book circular for *God of the Machine* into his correspondence and giving copies of the book to the future Michigan governor George Romney and fifty other auto executives. Paterson returned the favor by telling him that his book was "pro-communist," which gave him "a complete surprise and shock." Reading hastily, Paterson had misinterpreted Borth's reference to Russian workers being "freed" by the introduction of advanced machinery, and she leapt to the conclusion that he was yet another misguided student in need of correction.⁴²

Self-designated keepers of the flame, Lane, Paterson, and Rand were constructing strikingly similar personas as the "three furies" of libertarianism, as William F. Buckley remembered. His choice of words was not incidental. The sense that Lane, Paterson, and Rand were particularly abrasive or "difficult" was widespread. On a good day, even Paterson could admit this was true, writing to Rand, "I know and you know I am impatient, bad-tempered, short tempered; you are no sugar-stick yourself." Paterson justified these attitudes in terms of the urgent political situation: "Has not our anger a genuine relation to our recognition of the *absolute importance* of truth and reason? We know that it is a matter of life and death. If you know that, must you not *feel* it?" What Paterson did not state was how political activism enabled her, Rand, and Lane to sidestep the many cultural restrictions that guided proper conduct for women. Though Lane, Paterson, and Rand were performing the traditional women's work of community building and maintenance,

⁴¹ Paterson to Rand, Jan. 19, 1944, box 151-13C, Rand Papers. Russell Kirk told Paterson's biographer that he read her works religiously while serving in the army and that they also carried on a correspondence. Cox, *Woman and the Dynamo*, 360. According to Paterson's executor, most of this correspondence was destroyed when she weeded her files. Muriel Hall to Peter Ruber, Sept. 14, 1964, "Kirk, Dr. Russell 1964-65" folder, box 3, Paterson Papers. However, an intriguing letter Paterson wrote to "Sergeant" and copied to Rand survives in Rand's papers. Fragment of a letter to Sergeant, n.d., box 153-33-PATE, Rand Papers. Paterson may also have been referring to Kirk when she told Rand in a letter, "By the way, I met a young soldier today who had brains. On my word, he could think. This is astonishing." Paterson to Rand, Feb. 2, 1944, box 4, Paterson Papers. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago, 1953). On Paterson's contacts with J. Howard Pew, see Paterson to Rand, Dec. 15, 1943, box 151-13B, Rand Papers. Her meetings with Herbert Hoover are described in Paterson to Rand, Nov. 30, 1943, *ibid.*

⁴² Paterson to Crane, Aug. 10, 1945, box 151-13D, Rand Papers. Christy Borth, *Masters of Mass Production* (Indianapolis, 1945). Untitled letter, author unknown, n.d., *God of the Machine* Correspondence 1945 folder, box 7, Paterson Papers.

the extremity and urgency of the libertarian critique gave these women a space to flex and even violate the boundaries of conventional gender roles. In the service of libertarianism, Lane, Paterson, and Rand could be angry, aggressive, pushy, rude, outspoken—freely displaying a host of characteristics and emotions usually denied to women in polite company. Moreover, within the libertarian subculture, they were granted a measure of intellectual authority that would have been difficult for them to achieve elsewhere, both by virtue of their gender and their education. Through their letters and friendship, Lane, Paterson, and Rand were crafting an alternative microculture in which intellect, argument, and intensity were favored characteristics. As Paterson joked, they were “setting a new fashion in females.”⁴³

Paterson and Lane well understood the precarious position they occupied as female intellectuals, and they tried to pass this awareness on to Rand, acting as her mentors and guides. It was important that Rand not emphasize her femininity, Paterson urged, worried about Rand’s venture into the gilded social circles of the anti-Roosevelt business crowd. “By the way, you might think over the fact that wives are not necessarily pleased by a husband’s admiration of a young and pretty woman even if the latter has brains, (and a mink coat). If the young and pretty and brilliant female with the mink coat has also written a successful novel and got a Hollywood contract for astronomical money, that hardly helps the situation, I regret to state,” she cautioned Rand. Paterson advised her to strike up friendships with the wives of her new businessmen admirers.⁴⁴

And while principles were important, there was a danger of being too abrasive and aggressive, warned Lane when Rand clashed with Leonard Read. When Read founded FEE in 1945, he asked Rand to advise the new think tank about its publications, a request that Rand embraced with utmost seriousness. She was thus both outraged and offended when FEE failed to consult her about the publication of *Roofs or Ceilings?*, a pamphlet opposing rent control authored by the then-unknown economists Milton Friedman and George Stigler. According to Rand, the pamphlet was thoroughly collectivist in its reasoning and assumptions, and she told Read as much in a series of angry letters that ended their friendship. Briefed on the situation by several parties to the dispute, Lane was soothing and conciliatory in her response to Rand. While assuring Rand that she had “valid ground for the most extreme indignation,” Lane cautioned against “stirring it round and round.” Just as there was a time for aggression in the service of truth, there was also a time for accommodation and peacemaking with powerful allies. Both she and Paterson were eager to pass on the lessons they had learned after years of living in a man’s world, and they assumed a protective, almost maternal, stance toward their young protégé.⁴⁵

The dispute over *Roofs or Ceilings?* highlights once again how Lane, Paterson, and Rand had staked out a radical position at odds with other intellectuals who also sought to defend capitalism. The immediate issue was Friedman and Stigler’s use of the term

⁴³ John Chamberlain, “A Reviewer’s Notebook,” *Freeman*, 2 (June 1952), 627–28. Paterson to Rand, March 23, 1944, box 151-13D, Rand Papers. Emphasis in original. Members of patriotic women’s groups in the 1930s and 1940s similarly pushed the boundaries of female propriety through their activism. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 19. Paterson to Rand, Feb. 11, 1948, box 151-15A, Rand Papers.

⁴⁴ Paterson to Rand, Dec. 15, 1943, box 151-13B, Rand Papers.

⁴⁵ Milton Friedman and George J. Stigler, *Roofs or Ceilings? The Current Housing Problem* (Irvington-on-Hudson, 1946). Rand to Leonard Read, Sept. 12, 1946, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Berliner, 320–27; and Rand to William Mullendore, Sept. 20, 1946, *ibid.* Lane to Rand, Oct. 29, 1946, box 142Lax, Rand Papers. On the Rand-Read break, see Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 116–19.

rationing to describe the way prices determined the allocation of scarce resources. While the two economists were using language common to their academic field, given the context of wartime price controls, Rand and Lane believed the term set up a false equivalency between government action and the free market. Rand took the choice of language to be deliberately subversive, believing that the authors were communists. Lane thought instead it revealed an inability to communicate effectively with a mass audience, writing to FEE director V. Orval Watts that “the question is really one of word-use.” But as Watts told Stigler, Lane also made “a good point in arguing that government rationing and distribution in free markets are essentially different.” Also at issue were Friedman and Stigler’s embrace of equality as a goal of social policy, which clashed with the stark individualism of Lane and the others. As Watts, Read, Stigler, and Friedman jostled over the final form of the pamphlet, Watts enclosed a letter from Lane in his correspondence to Stigler. The episode foreshadowed the different paths Lane and Rand would take in the years ahead, with Rand choosing confrontation while Lane opted for persuasion.⁴⁶

The episode also highlights a depth of diversity and conflict on the ideological right that historians are just beginning to grapple with and suggests that Lane, Paterson, and Rand represented a powerful countercurrent within the conservative movement that persists to this day. The same issues that made *Roofs or Ceilings?* so problematic would surface again in the Mont Pèlerin Society, a group of economists and intellectuals organized by Hayek in 1947 to soothe the isolation felt by free-market advocates. Kept abreast of the society’s development by Crane, Watts, and other confidants, Lane both shared and shaped their fears that the Mont Pèlerin Society was threatened by enemies within who did not adequately understand liberty. As he sought funding for the society’s first meeting in the United States, Hayek reached out to Jasper Crane, who in turn sought Lane’s advice. She confirmed Crane’s fears that the society was being shaped by Europeans who were not “really reliable” and told him it must be “managed with a *firm* hand.” Her letters convinced him to hold off on bringing the group to the United States, and when Crane later did decide to sponsor the first American meeting of the society in 1958, he kept in close touch with Lane and even invited her to attend the meeting (she did not). Lane was also in frequent communication with *Discovery of Freedom* fan Jean Pierre Hamilius, a Luxembourgish economist who would later become president of the society, and she helped establish a friendship between him and Crane. Lane’s advice to Crane kept him firmly in the camp of those who were “sound in the faith,” as he put it, mapping onto an ideological cleavage between purebred American libertarians and more moderate Europeans that troubled the society. Over time, the Mont Pèlerin Society would evolve toward the stark, uncompromising individualism for which Lane had advocated for years. Although not caused by Lane, Paterson, and Rand, this shift in the Mont Pèlerin Society nonetheless represented an alignment toward their views and, as Lane might have claimed, the triumph of American ideas over European ones. Incorporating the furies into the intellectual history of conservatism provides a fuller context for international

⁴⁶ The quote from Lane comes in a two-page letter V. Orval Watts included in his correspondence with George Stigler. See V. Orval Watts to George Stigler, Aug. 7, 1946, folder 6 “Speeches and Writings, Roofs or Ceilings? Correspondence,” box 38, Milton Friedman Papers (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Calif.). Ultimately, the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) editors inserted an unauthorized footnote criticizing Milton Friedman and Stigler’s endorsement of equality, leading to several years of estrangement between the economists and FEE. See Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Two Lucky People: Memoirs* (Chicago, 1998), 150–52.

developments in free-market thought and a longer lineage for the libertarian populism of the Obama age.⁴⁷

The rise of the Mont Pèlerin Society foreshadowed a new focus for libertarians and a concomitant diminishment of the three furies. When Lane, Paterson, and Rand published their books in 1943, organized opposition to the New Deal was at a nadir. The American Liberty League was defunct and the few established intellectuals willing to take a libertarian or free-market stance—among them Nock and H. L. Mencken—were aged and rapidly losing influence. There was little competition and, in a decentralized movement with no formal positions or offices, few barriers to entry. Libertarianism needed all the help it could get. As Nock put it, in reference to Lane and Paterson, “As long as any one has the goods, I don’t particularly care whether they are kept under a bodice or a wes’coat.” But after World War II, libertarianism began to develop a more robust institutional framework. Groups such as FEE, the Volker Fund, and the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists began concentrating on winning over academic economists who could bring free market ideas to leading colleges and universities. Professionalization would close off the space Lane, Paterson, and Rand had once claimed.⁴⁸

Paterson was the first to lose her hold on her libertarian audience, suffering a mortal blow to her prestige when she was dismissed from the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1949. Without a regular by-line, it became more difficult for Paterson to retain the loyalty of the correspondents she regularly berated for their incompetence and stupidity. Bitter and prideful, Paterson attacked even editors who solicited her work, insisting their offered rate of pay was an insult to one of her stature. Though William F. Buckley succeeded in coaxing a few articles out of her for early issues of *National Review*, few editors were willing to endure the peppery negotiations over price and word count that came with any request. In the end, Paterson found herself an alienated intellectual, a role that suited her cantankerous personality.⁴⁹

Lane, by contrast, settled in comfortably behind the scenes of organized conservatism, avoiding opportunities to take on a more public role. When Congressman Howard Buffett of Nevada, a member of the House Banking and Currency Committee, asked her to testify before Congress about the dangers of Bretton Woods, the postwar agreement that established the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The isolationist Buffett hoped Lane would stress the dangers of binding U.S. economic policy to other nations. Lane passed the opportunity instead to Watts of FEE, instructing him to “talk plain sense.” Secure in her relationship with Jasper Crane, she continued to develop new contacts on the

⁴⁷ The once-obscure Mont Pèlerin Society has emerged in recent scholarship as ground zero of an aggressive neoliberal ideology bent on global conquest. See Mirowski and Plehwe, eds., *Road from Mont Pèlerin*. Lane to Crane, Oct. 3, 1954, in *Lady and the Tycoon*, ed. MacBride, 103, 105. Emphasis in original. Crane to Lane, Sept. 30, 1957, *ibid.*, 181. Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012). Angus Burgin argues the shift toward individualism was presided over by Friedman, whose views had evolved to a “more strident market advocacy.” See *ibid.*, 10. Levy, Peart, and Albert frame differences in the early Mont Pèlerin Society as between “liberals and individualists.” See Levy, Peart, and Albert, “Economic Liberals as Quasi-Public Intellectuals,” 10. Ross Douthat, “Libertarian Populism and Its Critics,” *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 2013, <http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/libertarian-populism-and-its-critics/>. For an account of the conservative division in 1960s Phoenix politics, see Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia, 2013), esp. 302–35.

⁴⁸ Nock to Paul Palmer, July 8, 1943, in *Selected Letters of Albert Jay Nock*, ed. Francis J. Nock (Caldwell, 1962), 146. Phillips-Fein, “Business Conservatives and the Mont Pèlerin Society,” 281–82.

⁴⁹ The letters between William F. Buckley and Paterson are a testament to Buckley’s patience. See William F. Buckley to Paterson, Dec. 5, 1955, April 6, 1956, Paterson Correspondence file, William F. Buckley Jr. Papers (ms 576) (Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn.). See also Paterson to Chamberlain, April 23, 1952, box 7, Paterson Papers.

antigovernment right. She continued to function as a gatekeeper of sorts, editing the National Economic Council (NEC) *Review of Books*, a small newsletter sent primarily to a business readership, and advising the Volker Fund on which economists and writers it should fund. In 1947 she kicked off a major controversy with a scathing attack on the economist Lorie Tarshis's *The Elements of Economics* (1947), the first textbook to introduce Keynesian economics to American universities. Lane's review and a subsequent NEC campaign effectively stopped sales of Tarshis's textbook. Her review, which Buckley later cribbed for his 1950 *God and Man at Yale*, also left a lasting legacy for the way economists communicated with the public. Later, Lane would become an unlikely inspirational figure for young activists in the 1960s, primarily through her connection to the anarchistic Freedom School run by Robert LeFevre in Colorado. Never satisfied with the *Discovery of Freedom*, Lane revised the book several times but did not publish a new edition. She did, however, create a popular needlework series published in *Women's Day*. Lane managed to make even needlework political, framing it as a uniquely American art form drawing on the free individual. In 1965 at seventy-eight she traveled to Vietnam for *Women's Day* under the auspices of the Defense Department, reporting back on the Vietnamese struggle for freedom.⁵⁰

Rand proved most successful at spreading her ideas, leaving a legacy that dwarfed those of Lane and Paterson. Part of Rand's greater success was simply generational. While Lane and Paterson were entering their twilight years, Rand was just getting started. She outlived Paterson by twenty-one years and Lane by fourteen. But Rand also sought the limelight just as Lane and Paterson retreated to private life, testifying before the House

⁵⁰ Buffett to Lane, March 10, 1945, with Lane's typed note to Watts, folder 10 Correspondence—Lane, Rose Wilder, box 2, Vernon Orval Watts Papers (Hoover Institution Archives). Watts testified before Congress in May 1945. Watts told Congress that the agreement would “tend to destroy private enterprise” by creating a powerful government bank.” See “Statement of Dr. V. Orval Watts, Economic Counsel, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce,” *Bretton Woods Agreements Act: Hearing before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, Seventy-Ninth Congress, First Session on H.R. 2211 . . . Volume 2* (Washington, 1945), 1085–1126, esp. 1088. Rose Wilder Lane, untitled review essay, *National Economic Council Review of Books*, 4 (Aug. 1947), 1–8. Lane's review of *The Elements of Economics* took up the entire newsletter, which ran to an unprecedented eight pages (the newsletter typically ran four pages and covered multiple books). Lorie Tarshis, *The Elements of Economics: An Introduction to the Theory of Price and Employment* (Boston, 1947). William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man At Yale: The Superstitions of “Academic Freedom”* (1951; Washington, 2002), 64. The incident is described in David Colander and Harry Landreth, “Political Influence on the Textbook Keynesian Revolution: God, Man, and Lorie Tarshis at Yale,” in *Keynesianism and the Keynesian Revolution in America: A Memorial Volume in Honour of Lorie Tarshis*, ed. Oscar F. Hamouda and Betsy B. Price (Cheltenham, 1998), 59–72. David Colander and Harry Landreth present Lane as a passive mouthpiece, rather than an agent with her own ideas, even as they detail Buckley's borrowings from her review and quote Lorie Tarshis's recollection that Lane's review, not Buckley's book, destroyed his sales. By contrast, Levy, Peart, and Albert emphasize how Lane's distinctive political philosophy shaped her attack on Tarshis's textbook. See Levy, Peart, and Albert, “Economic Liberals as Quasi-Public Intellectuals.” One consequence of Lane's review was reduced competition in the field's textbook market, leading to the triumph of “thin” models that ironically overestimated the success of Soviet economic planning. David M. Levy and Sandra Peart, “Soviet Growth and American Textbooks: An Endogenous Past,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 78 (April 2011), 110–25. Colander and Landreth conclude the controversy “helped create a technicalization of what we teach students, and in so doing has influenced the direction of economics away from the true policy debates which necessarily involve clashes of ideology, and toward a discussion of make-believe policy fights centered around technical aspects of models.” Colander and Landreth, “Political Influence on the Textbook Keynesian Revolution,” 71. Similarly, Paul Samuelson, the author of the textbook that supplanted Tarshis's, admitted that he “wrote carefully and lawyer-like” to avoid similar problems. Paul A. Samuelson, *Economics: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1948). Samuelson quoted in “Paul Anthony Samuelson,” in *The Coming of Keynesianism to America: Conversations with the Founders of Keynesian Economics*, ed. David Colander and Harry Landreth (Brookfield, 1996), 172. Lane's work on the *Review of Books* put her in alliance with Merwin K. Hart, president of the National Economic Council, who was later attacked by Isaac Don Levine as an anti-Semite. Isaac Don Levine, “The Strange Case of Merwin K. Hart,” *Plain Talk* (Feb. 1950), 1–9. On the career of Robert LeFevre, a former spiritualist and anticommunist speaker, as well as the Freedom School (also known as Rampart College), see Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 312–22. Lane's needlework articles, which appeared over many issues, were collected and published in Rose Wilder Lane, *Women's Day Book of American Needlework* (New York, 1963). Rose Wilder Lane, “August in Viet Nam,” *Woman's Day*, 29 (Dec. 1965), 33–35, 89–90, 92–94.



This photograph shows Rose Wilder Lane at home in Danbury, Connecticut, in 1942 surrounded by books. *Photo by Russell Ogg. Courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum.*

Un-American Activities Committee as a friendly witness in 1947, and plunging enthusiastically into the anticommunist networks of Hollywood when she moved back to California. Moreover, Rand also managed to transform her distance from organized conservatism into an asset, rather than a liability, by forging a homegrown community of intellectuals devoted exclusively to her ideas. For years after her break with Leonard Read, she remained a presence in the conservative social worlds of Los Angeles and New York. But by 1952, when the conservatives of her acquaintance began supporting Eisenhower, who she considered a hopeless moderate, Rand was ready to strike out on her own. Turning her back on organized conservatism, she gathered a circle of young acolytes enthralled by her new philosophy of objectivism, a fully realized rational philosophical system based upon ethical selfishness that she hoped would replace collectivism in the popular mind. Objectivism, which would become a social and political movement as well as a philosophy, spawned an active cadre of followers eager to promote Rand's ideas. Finally, Rand had a gift that few contemporary authors could match for reaching a popular audience with her fiction. *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) was uniformly panned by critics yet became a best seller. Even as she attacked religion, her novels became totemic texts for young conservatives excited by her iconoclastic presentation of capitalism and individualism as the philosophies of the future. By the time of *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand had moved closer to the

universalism of Lane and Paterson, minimizing the connection between masculinity and individualism that had so pervaded *The Fountainhead*.⁵¹

By then, the furies had long since turned on each other. Lane remembered an ongoing patter between her and Paterson about “the brotherhood of man,” one of Lane’s cherished concepts. Whenever Lane brought it up, Paterson would ritualistically repeat, “Stalin is no brother of mine.” Lane remembered the denouement: “After about a year of hearing that, one day I said to her, ‘Nobody agrees with you more heartily than Stalin.’ Thus ended our conversations and what had been called friendship.” And though Lane and Rand had traded thick letters for years, their correspondence could not paper over a growing difference about religion. On one of her periodic trips east, Rand journeyed with her husband to Lane’s Connecticut house where the two women argued for hours over the existence of God; afterward, both felt they had gotten the better of the dispute and judged their antagonist less than impressive intellectually. The bond between Paterson and Rand ruptured in California, where Rand had relocated to assist in the film adaptation of *The Fountainhead*. Paterson came for a visit in a foul mood and systematically ruined a variety of social gatherings Rand had arranged for her, and afterward the two never spoke again. The dawn of McCarthyism, the rise of the military-industrial complex, and the civil rights movement were landmarks of the postwar world the furies would face alone.⁵²

By any measure, the years of collaboration and consultation between Lane, Paterson, and Rand, however fleeting, had been enormously productive and consequential. Working together, each woman made a far greater impression than any of the three would have alone. Their fierce attacks upon apathetic capitalists helped convince wealthy businessmen to fund the first generation of right-wing think tanks, and their books, letters, tirades, and friendships shaped an oppositional subculture that would eventually mount a successful challenge to New Deal liberalism. The men who received their letters had money, influence, and a vague discontent with the direction of the country. Lane, Paterson, and Rand helped crystallize their ideas and set their reactions to Roosevelt in an intellectual and historical context. The three also provided hope and encouragement that the cause was not lost, perhaps the most priceless offering of all. Articulated first in fiction and then refined and promoted in their nonfiction and letters, the triumphal self that Lane, Paterson, and Rand created served as both a justification and an inspiration for the minimal state their business correspondents craved.

Over time, the roles of Lane, Paterson, and Rand have become obscured by a focus on women who more consistently advocated female independence or on conservative women who used maternalist arguments to secure political power. Their lives suggest, however, that the search for an intellectual history of women must not only include collective movements such as feminism and antifeminism but also must acknowledge the contributions that women have made to the putatively “male-centered discourse” of individualism. Indeed, putting Lane, Paterson, and Rand back into the picture helps us see that the

⁵¹ Rand has also attracted the most attention from scholars, including the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, founded in 1999 and now published biannually by Penn State University Press. See Jennifer Burns, “Godless Capitalism: Ayn Rand and the Conservative Movement,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 1 (Nov. 2004), 359–85. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York, 1957).

⁵² For Lane’s description of both encounters, see Lane to Crane, March 13, 1963, box 4, Lane Papers. Rand covered a follow-up letter from Lane with critical annotations but never responded. Lane to Rand, n.d. (Sunday), box 143-LO3, Rand Papers. Watts described a slightly different ending of the Lane-Paterson friendship in a letter to William Mullendore, writing that Paterson had called Lane a communist. Watts to Mullendore, Nov. 2, 1946, box 20, folder 1, “Friedman, Milton and George G. Stigler Editorial Comments and Correspondence,” Watts Papers. *The Fountainhead*, dir. King Vidor (Warner Bros., 1949).

autonomous self of libertarianism, as disconnected as it may seem from gender-specific concerns or the lived experience of women, was in fact constructed by three women and was fundamentally related to their quest to be seen as individuals who need not heed the imperatives of gender. Lane, Paterson, and Rand's political activism, with its emphasis on education, mentoring, and personal connection, offers another way to understand the impact of gender on the historical emergence of libertarianism.⁵³

The absence of all three women from the literature on women's history and intellectual history also speaks to larger questions of methodology and focus. Lane, Paterson, and Rand have fallen through the cracks of historical memory in part because of their politics. As Michelle Nickerson argues in a recent work on conservative women, feminism has "become a central logic for determining the value of female political identity well beyond the scope of its own historical influence, in ways that possibly distort our understanding of women's history by simplifying representations of human action." Yet they have also been overlooked due to their modes of intellectual production and interchange. While all were published authors, much of their significant intellectual work took place behind the published word, in the informal networks they nurtured and the individual tutorials they conducted through letters and lunches. These fragmentary manifestos and scattered arguments remind us that the intellectual world of women, by necessity, often thrives outside established institutions.⁵⁴

Beyond the romance of the unfettered self, what Lane, Paterson, and Rand offered was a politically loaded juxtaposition between creative individuals and destructive government. This negative vision of the state marks a significant moment in American intellectual life. Their vision of state and society was radical at the time, but it became increasingly accepted as it was integrated into the broad conservative movement and rearticulated and rebroadcast through an institutional apparatus that they helped inspire. Today it is axiomatic for conservatives to believe, just as Lane, Paterson, and Rand taught, that individuals alone drive economic prosperity and that government has no role to play in generating wealth. Few understand that, to paraphrase Keynes and Hawthorne, they are distilling the frenzy of some long-dead scribbling women.

⁵³ On "male-centered discourse" of individualism, see Kerber, "Women and Individualism in American History," 606.

⁵⁴ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 169. Historians of another time or place might more naturally look to "women's social and intellectual networks, to the unpublished world of diaries, letters, and commonplace books." Winterer, "Is There an Intellectual History of Early American Women?," 173. Sarah Igo's current work on "free-range" intellectual history may suggest a new willingness among historians to study intellectual life beyond the traditional canon. Angus Burgin, "The 'Futures' of American Intellectual History," *U.S. Intellectual History Blog*, Oct. 21, 2013, <http://s-usih.org/2013/10/the-futures-of-american-intellectual-history-guest-post-by-angus-burgin.html>.