

## The Solzhenitsyn Files

Edited and with an introduction by  
Michael Scammell

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Reviewed by Robert Batemarco

“Freedom without a literature is like health without food. It just cannot be. To be sure, the yearning for freedom is deep in the hearts of men, even the slaves of the Soviets. But the yearning can turn into hard, numb despair if the faith upon which freedom thrives is not revived from time to time by reference to its philosophy. It is not without reason that the communists do away with writers on freedom. . . .”

So wrote Frank Chodorov, former editor of *The Freeman*, over 40 years ago. The story of Alexander Solzhenitsyn provides a case in point. Michael Scammell skillfully teases out that story from over 150 recently declassified documents from Soviet archives. The only thing that detracts from the drama of the events described therein is that many of us already know how it turned out. For those readers not familiar with the whole affair, Scammell's excellent introduction places everything in context. The book covers a 17-year period starting with the beginning of the end of Nikita Khrushchev's thaw in 1963 through Solzhenitsyn's being awarded the Nobel Prize in literature and his years of exile.

In between, we are treated to a fly-on-the-wall view of Soviet Politburo agonizing over how to stop Solzhenitsyn's searing criticism of the Soviet system without provoking adverse reaction from the West. The alternatives they consider range from “editing down” his works to the point of eliminating their appeal abroad to trying and imprisoning him. They eventually settle on exile and revocation of his Soviet citizenship.

It is enlightening to hear firsthand the Politburo's morbid fear of criticism, their straitened views of free expression (“the Soviet writer will go his own way. Together with the Party”), the extent of their surveil-

lance activities (knowing where he shops, what he spends, and recording his conversations with his children), their attempts to discredit him even after his expulsion, accusing him of employing some of their very own *modus operandi* (“lies, juggling of facts, intentional distortion of the truth, etc.”) and being out of touch with reality (KGB head and later party chairman Yuri Andropov claims, “there are indications that domestic and foreign policies of the Party enjoy the unanimous support of all the Soviet people,” for instance).

We also hear from Solzhenitsyn himself, in his courageous letter to the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers as well as some of his seized manuscripts. We can see for ourselves the qualities of mind and character which made him such a threat in the eyes of the Soviets. Contrast the prescience of the following statement with the self-delusion of the Andropov quote cited above: “This is a government without prospects. They have no conveyor belts connecting them to ideology, or the masses, or the economy, or foreign policy, or to the world communist movement—nothing. The levers to all the conveyor belts have broken down and don't function. They can decide all they want sitting at their desks. Yet it's clear at once that it's not working. You see? Honestly, I have that impression. They're paralyzed.”

Although the documents included here of necessity reflect the Party's perspective, most readers will take them not at face value, but rather as a glimpse into the pathology of power. The lesson of the demise of that power is that nothing is more effective in curing its pathology than the truth. □

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**Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical**

by Chris Matthew Sciabarra

Pennsylvania State University Press • 1995 •  
477 pages • \$55.00 cloth; \$18.95 paperback

Reviewed by David M. Brown

**M**uch to my surprise the author of *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, a comprehensive new study of Rand's thought and its genesis in Russian culture, has persuaded me that something called "dialectics" is integral to Ayn Rand's philosophic approach and crucial to its success.

*Russian Radical* is a different kind of look at Ayn Rand, a full-fledged "hermeneutic" on the contours, development, and interpretation of her thought. Not to fear. Chris Sciabarra is a visiting scholar at New York University who easily deploys crypto-post-modernist scholarly lingo, but he does not seem to be entirely depraved. His fundamental sympathy with Rand's thought is obvious; and clearly, Sciabarra wants to convey its complexity and power to an academic audience that has often dismissed Rand's rational egoism and libertarianism as polemical and shallow.

Sciabarra wants to approach Objectivism "as an evolved response to the dualities Rand confronted in Soviet Russia. Although she rejected both the mysticism of Russia's religious traditions and the secular collectivism of the Russian Marxists, she nonetheless remained a profoundly *Russian* thinker." The author argues, "Rand's Russian nature was not reflected merely in her heavy foreign accent or in the length of her novels. She was Russian in more fundamental ways. In the sweeping character of her generalizations, and in her passionate commitment to the practical realization of her ideals, Rand was fully within the Russian literary and philosophic tradition." The historical inquiry and speculation about Rand's Russian roots is core to Sciabarra's project. As political scientist and intellectual historian, his goal in the book is not to evaluate the validity of Rand's radical ideas (although his analysis is frequently suggestive on that

score) but to interpret them in their historical context.

After examining the historical background in Russia, Sciabarra goes on to consider how Rand's dialectical rejection of dualism, as a "by-product" of her Russian heritage, saturated every aspect of her thought. From this angle he dissects the systemic relations of being and knowing, ethics, art, politics, sex, and "history and resolution," critically illuminating not only Rand's own thought but also its development and amendment in the hands of her followers, orthodox and non-orthodox alike. At every step, Sciabarra's scrupulous scholarship, dispassionate tone and dialectically dynamic argument are calculated to render Rand as palatable as possible to serious academic consideration. But the book is not aimed only at academics. It also invites those who already appreciate Rand to consider her thought anew.

Rand has repeatedly been read as a kind of "vulgar" Nietzschean egoist herself. But true to her non-dualism, Rand's mature theory in fact transcends the false alternative of sacrificing one's self to others or sacrificing others to one's self. She rejects not only the masochism of conventional altruism but the sadism of conventional, other-trampling "egoism." To pursue one's long-range interests rationally, one functions as neither master nor slave. Rand vividly illustrates these themes in her novel *The Fountainhead*, in which the Nietzschean kinds of egoist are contrasted with the more independent-minded, self-sufficient Howard Roark. Roark succeeds by earning the trust and rational agreement of others, and by trading values with them, not by getting anyone's self-sacrificial submission (despite dramatic opportunities to do so).

Sciabarra's insight into the import of Rand's integrative, contextualist dialectic is part of what makes his book distinctive and challenging. His methodology will be controversial, and here I cannot begin to suggest its playing out in the skein of the "hermeneutic." I take his understanding of Randian dialectic to be somewhat problem-