
Ayn Rand and Marilyn Monroe: Making Your Own Boundaries

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Abstract

When Alisa Rozenbaum, at 21, landed in New York, she relinquished her Russian name and abandoned her Russian life. Her first publications, in Russian, had been a profile of the film star Pola Negri and Gollivud: Kino-Gorod (Hollywood, City of Movies). She chose, at 21, to inhabit the environment she had described and to write in its language. Heading for Hollywood, she began her American writing career as "Ayn Rand." Ten years later, having sold a screenplay and having seen a play produced on Broadway, she published her first novel, set in Russia, from which the heroine (based on herself) resolves to escape. The novel ends in blood—at the border. The writer crossed that border permanently. She took pride in her struggle. In 1940, the actress Gloria Swanson, a personal friend, leased a Union Square theatre and asked her to speak there, as part of Wendell Willkie's presidential campaign. When a heckler asked why anyone should respect a speaker whose Russian accent revealed her foreign origins, she replied: I chose to be an American. What did you do, other than being born here? She published best-selling novels set in the United States: *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Choosing a homeland was a reflection of her belief that people, in selecting their values, create their souls. The aspiration to shape one's own life was a quality she celebrated in Marilyn Monroe, whom she admired as a performer and as a woman. In a memorial tribute, she quoted the film star: "I didn't like the world around me because it was kind of grim-but I loved to play house and it was like you could make your own boundaries." The writer added: Marilyn "went through hell to make her own boundaries." They both did.

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