

2017

"The Experience of Flying": The Rand Dogma and its Literary Vehicle

Camille Bond
cbond@wellesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection>

Recommended Citation

Bond, Camille, "'The Experience of Flying': The Rand Dogma and its Literary Vehicle" (2017). *Honors Thesis Collection*. 418.
<http://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection/418>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. For more information, please contact ir@wellesley.edu.

“The Experience of Flying”:
The Rand Dogma and its Literary Vehicle

Camille Bond

Submitted in the Partial Fulfillment of the
Prerequisite for Honors in English

April 2017

© 2017 Camille Bond

The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.
Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY RAND?	2
CHAPTER ONE: ON <i>THE FOUNTAINHEAD</i> AND CHARACTER	8
CHAPTER TWO: ON <i>ATLAS SHRUGGED</i> AND PLOT	39
CONCLUSION	70
WORKS CITED	71

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Bill Cain: Thank you for taking this project under your wing! I could not have asked for a more helpful advisor on what has turned out to be one of the most satisfying journeys of my life.

To James Noggle and Jimmy Wallenstein: Thank you for your keen suggestions and advice, which brought new contexts and a clearer direction to this project.

To Adam Weiner: Thank you for your assistance, and for the inspiration that *How Bad Writing Destroyed the World* provided.

And to my family: Thank you for your support and encouragement, and for making this project possible.

INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY RAND?

Very understandably, I have been asked the question “Why would you study Ayn Rand?” dozens of times since I undertook this project over the summer of 2016. In a decidedly liberal community, Rand’s name alone invokes hostility and disgust; even my past self would have been puzzled to learn that she would go on to spend a year of her life engaging academically with Rand’s work. Many of Rand’s ideas are morally repulsive; it can be physically difficult to read her fiction. In this introduction, I will briefly outline the reasons why I chose to do so.

I have been fascinated by Rand since I first encountered *The Fountainhead* in a high-school classroom, and watched many of my peers fall under its spell. This spell -- the power that the novel seemed, somehow, to have -- was as puzzling as it was riveting. My classmates were not the only ones succumbing to the thrall of Ayn Rand. According to the Ayn Rand Institute, 27 million copies of Rand’s novels have been sold to date; they have been translated into 31 languages; and about 400,000 copies find their way into classrooms each year (“About Ayn Rand”). Academia may tend to ignore Rand, but her novels continue to thrive in popular culture.

Meanwhile, Rand’s ideology has had an enormous impact upon American politics. From Ronald Reagan to Alan Greenspan, many of the country’s most powerful figures have cited Rand as a philosophical influence. In an interview during the 2016 election, Donald Trump “described himself as an Ayn Rand fan. He identified with Howard Roark, the novel's idealistic protagonist who designs skyscrapers and rages against the establishment” (Powers). Surely, Rand’s

gravitational pull alone justifies a closer study of her fiction. If enormous numbers of our general populace -- numbers that include some extremely powerful individuals -- are thinking along Rand's lines, then it is important to understand exactly how her mode of thought operates.

Ayn Rand (née Alisa Rosenbaum) was born in Petrograd to a bourgeois family. After the October Revolution in 1917, the family's property was seized by the Bolshevik regime, and the Rosenbaums entered a period of strife. Rand left the Soviet Union for the United States in 1925, but the impact of socialism upon her early life would color her thought and work until her death in 1982. Jeff Walker comments on the influence of socialism upon Rand: "what Rand in fact took from her strictly Russian milieu was little more than a perceived need to counter Marxist ideology with an alternative in-depth complex of ideas" (Walker 3). Perhaps traumatized by her early experiences, Rand felt the need to combat the ideology that had effected such a drastic upheaval for her family with a philosophy of her own.

It is generally taken for granted that Rand's novels are works of pure fiction. Yet Rand's writing had a specific, political mission, and thus it seems important to evaluate the extent to which her fiction operates as propaganda. Rand publicly distanced herself from propaganda fiction, remarking in an interview: "I don't think of myself as a propagandist" (Nichols 272). In her private writings, however, her vision of herself shifts. Jeff Walker notes that "Rand implicitly drew a parallel between what leading socialist-realists such as Maksim Gorki were doing for Bolshevism and what she was doing for capitalism. 'Propaganda is the whole meaning of life and reality,' she wrote, frankly and proudly characterizing her writing mission as that of a propagandist" (Walker 288).

Privately, Rand viewed herself at least in part as a propagandist. In his discussion of the effects of Rand's philosophy upon a young mind, Nathaniel Branden reflects that:

The problem lies in the fact that a good novelist has to consider many other elements besides philosophical exposition: drama, pace, excitement, suspense, and so forth. There is no time for the kind of qualifications... that slow down the pace. So what we get are broad slashes, sharp-cutting strokes, which can make superb reading and fantastic theatre -- *unless* you're sixteen years old, reading this novel and feeling more excited than you've ever felt in your life... and taking it all in as if it were to be read like a philosophical treatise (Branden, "The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand" 42).

Thus, Rand's writing tends in particular to manipulate the minds of readers who misunderstand the nature of her writing. Those who enter Rand's fictional worlds with the misconception that they are reading a philosophical treatise become vulnerable to Rand's emotionally manipulative, propaganda tactics. It is my hope that, by analyzing these tactics and becoming more aware of the ways in which Rand's fiction operates upon the reader's mind, we can piece together a clearer understanding of the nature of her fiction, and perhaps put otherwise vulnerable minds on their guard against manipulation.

It seems likely that Rand's philosophy developed out of an obsessive desire to destroy the Marxist ideology that had wreaked havoc upon her family in her early life. As Walker puts it: "Objectivism had begun as Ayn Rand's way of dealing with the world" (Walker 6). Objectivism functioned for Rand as a defense against an ideology in which she and her bourgeois family were classified as *the enemy*. Objectivism reverses the moral logic of socialism, casting the elite as the victims of society, and the masses as the villains. The inherently reactionary, defensive, and emotional nature of Objectivism may help to explain its undying appeal in American society. As leftist socio-political thought puts increasing pressure on the historically and actually privileged,

this pressure tends to invoke a furious defensiveness. Rand's ideology is ready-made to bolster the defense of those who feel themselves persecuted by left-wing ideology, precisely because Rand constructed the ideology to suit the same purpose in her own life.

Objectivism views reason as the highest human faculty; it purports to be completely logically consistent, and to explain every aspect of existence using a set of core, universal truths. Rand was deeply mistaken in her belief that Objectivism contained no logical flaws: Albert Ellis devotes an entire book, *Is Objectivism a Religion?*, to pointing out some of these inconsistencies. However, Rand notoriously refused to hear criticism of her ideas or her writing. Branden comments on her totalitarian tendencies:

Ayn always insisted that her philosophy was an integrated whole, that it was entirely self-consistent, and that one could not reasonably pick elements of her philosophy and discard others... What she was saying, translated into simple English is: Everything I have to say in the field of philosophy is true, absolutely true, and therefore any departure necessarily leads you into error. Don't try to mix your irrational fantasies with my immutable truths. This insistence turned Ayn Rand's philosophy, for all practical purposes, into dogmatic religion, and many of her followers chose that path (Branden, "The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand" 63).

Rand's insistence on the absolute supremacy of her ideas, along with her refusal to acknowledge the mounting wall of argument against her, or even to consider genuine concerns from devoted followers, points to the desperately emotional nature of her investment in Objectivism -- despite all her lip-service to reason.

Once we accept that Rand's totalitarian attitude resulted from her emotional attachment to Objectivist ideology, we can infer that emotion may be responsible for the similar attitudes of Rand's present-day proponents. It is this emotional drive behind Rand's ideology, masked behind claims to logic, that effectively makes productive argument with a true believer impossible. For an Objectivist, the word logical becomes a label which is applied almost

arbitrarily in order to justify the individual's behavior. In order to communicate with individuals who barricade themselves in this manner against opposing ideologies -- trying, and often succeeding, in making themselves entirely unreachable -- it is crucial to understand the emotionality behind their views. Emotionality is the vulnerable point in Rand's ideology: the more we understand the way in which Rand's tactics appeal to people's emotions, the better-prepared we will be to challenge them.

Rand's ideas are dangerous -- but this project has convinced me that her expository and argumentative styles are much more dangerous. While one might identify logical fallacies and contradictions in Rand's ideology, and argue against it, Rand's *presentation* of her ideology effectively protects it from outside criticism. Rand once wrote that "The primary purpose of an airplane is not to *teach* man to fly, but to give him the actual experience of flying. So is the primary purpose of an art work" (Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* 171). Her techniques not only teach readers about her philosophy, but give them the experience of living in a world governed by it. The appeal of such a world has caused many of Rand's believers to abandon reality.

In the chapters that follow, I will examine Rand's major fictional works, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, and will seek to identify the major stylistic features through which Rand so effectively, and insidiously, frames her ideology. In doing so, I aim to expose the stylistic and rhetorical devices that comprise the literary vessel of Rand's ideas -- in the hope that, by understanding the ways in which these devices function, we can engage more productively with proponents of Rand's ideology. If we choose not to engage with this demographic, we make ourselves guilty of Rand's own crime of ideological self-isolation.

Furthermore, we allow Rand's demographic to fester in its own echo-chamber of ideas, and we allow her ideas to continue their influence over our government and society.

CHAPTER ONE: ON *THE FOUNTAINHEAD* AND CHARACTER

When *The Fountainhead* was first published in 1943, it received a mixed critical reaction. Barbara Branden, a member of Rand's inner circle at the time of the novel's publication, recounts: "There were many attacks, most of which ignored the ideological content and damned it as dull, badly written, with implausible characters... None of the major magazines, with the exception of *The Saturday Review*, even mentioned its existence" (Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand* 178). However, public reception more than made up for the dismissiveness of critics, and the novel became a bestseller within two years of its initial publication ("Novels & Works of Ayn Rand"). To date, 7.9 million copies of the novel have been sold, according to the Ayn Rand Institute, ("Novels & Works of Ayn Rand") and its legacy is more alive than ever. Stephen Cox, prominent libertarian, insists that *The Fountainhead* is "more than a novel. It's a metaphysical statement, a treatise on psychological theory, an aesthetic manifesto, a commentary on American architecture, an analysis of ethics, a declaration of political principles" (Cox, "The Literary Achievement of *The Fountainhead*").

The Fountainhead chronicles the architectural career of Howard Roark, a modernist who boldly defies the aesthetic conventions of the establishment. Roark's untameable genius threatens this establishment, which prizes conventionality above originality, and actively conspires to trample any innovators who may threaten the status quo. Roark's career becomes a battle against the institutions of architecture, representing the larger battle between individualism and collectivism that Rand believed colored all aspects of contemporary American society. Indeed, Rand describes the theme of *The Fountainhead* as "individualism versus collectivism,

not in politics, but in man's soul; the psychological motivations and the basic premises that produce the character of an individualist or a collectivist" (Rand, *For the New Intellectual* 68). In the end, Roark triumphs against the architectural establishment, symbolizing what Rand saw as the inevitable triumph of individualism over collectivism.

Character Integration and Rand's Moral Binary

Both Rand's commentary on *The Fountainhead*, and scholarship on the novel, often refer to integration, a literary technique of Rand's own invention. Integration involves the construction of all aspects of the novel with reference to a basic, unifying theme (Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* 58-59). Rand viewed the technique as "a cardinal principle of good fiction," (Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* 63) and relied upon it heavily in her creation of the worlds, characters, and events of her novels.

Rand's technique of integration frames the theme of individualism versus collectivism as the driving force behind *The Fountainhead*: every person, every event, every work of art is represented in terms of its alignment in the struggle between the two ideologies. Integration becomes most powerful where it affects Rand's characters, who are transformed by the technique into embodiments of abstract principles. In his discussion of Rand's use of integration in character-building, Edward Younkens asserts that "Rand's emblematic characters have all irrelevancies and accidents removed. Rand probes each character's motives, connects a set of personal traits to each character's motivation, and integrates the actions of the characters with their motivation and character traits" (Younkens 125). Integration seems to satisfy a thirst for

logical consistency in many of Rand's readers -- although it seems clear from an outside perspective that integration provides only the *appearance* of logical consistency. Most novels take a top-down approach to world-building: they represent realistic worlds and illustrate the ways in which various ideas function within these worlds. In contrast, Rand takes a bottom-up approach, using integration to build a static, alternate universe upon the foundation of her ideology. The apparent logical consistency of many of the events and ideas in Rand's writing can thus be discounted, as the logic by which they function is not the logic of the real world, but rather of Rand's Objectivist alternate universe.

Below, I will explore character integration in *The Fountainhead* in order to determine its effects upon the experience of the reader, and its contribution to the efficiency of Rand's literary vehicle for her philosophical message.

In "The Goal of My Writing," Rand states explicitly: "This is the motive and purpose of my writing: *the projection of an ideal man*. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal, as an end in itself -- to which any didactic, intellectual, or philosophical values contained in a novel are only the means" (Rand, *The Fountainhead* vii). Any analysis of *The Fountainhead* must concern itself with Roark, as Rand herself admits that all other elements of the novel function as a part of the vehicle which portrays her hero. Rand acknowledged the critical importance of stylistic integration to her characterization of Roark. Discussing the impact of Roark's character upon readers in *The Art of Fiction*, Rand posits that Roark "comes across as a monolith because every facet is consistent with his basic premises" (Rand, *The Art of Fiction*

67). In other words, Roark's power, which captivates so many readers, derives from the fact that every aspect of his character is built upon a unifying, philosophical idea.

Rand sets Roark apart from her other characters by establishing him as the sole possessor of a completely developed, all-encompassing ideology of individualism. While other characters (chiefly Dominique Francon and Gail Wynand) hold fragmented or corrupted versions of an individualist ideology, Roark alone possesses the full framework, and thus he becomes a philosophical guide to the lesser-individualists. The ultimate conflict in Roark's romantic relationship with Dominique generates from Dominique's incomplete ideology. Rand herself describes Dominique as "guilty of holding a mistaken, though not irrational, philosophy" (Rand, *The Art of Fiction* 41). The essential flaw in her worldview is her inability to disconnect herself from the world of the second-handers (that is, those who fail to live as individualists), and numb herself to the existential injustices dealt out by the masses.

We see the effects of this flaw in Dominique's destruction of a statue of Helios, which we learn of through a dialogue between Dominique and Alvah Scarrett:

'I got it out of a museum in Europe. I had a terrible time getting it -- it wasn't for sale, of course. I think I was in love with it, Alvah. I brought it home with me... I threw it down the air shaft. There's a concrete floor below.'

'Are you totally crazy? Why?'

'So that no one else would ever see it'" (Rand 145).

The idea of sharing any entity of aesthetic value with the masses tortures Dominique; therefore, she actively seeks to destroy anything she considers to be beautiful, including Roark and his work. Not only does Roark recognize this flaw in Dominique's philosophy -- he issues the remedy for her suffering: "You must learn not to be afraid of the world. Not to be held by it as you are now. Never to be hurt by it..." (Rand 376). Roark becomes Dominique's spiritual guide,

leading her away from the mundane world of the collectivists and into his own, shining realm of individualism. Interestingly, though Rand openly criticizes many religions' rejections of the physical world for a spiritual one, she uses a similar concept here in opposing Roark and the higher world of the individualists against the world of the collectivists or second-handers.

Roark takes on a similar role in his relationship with Gail Wynand. In the later stages of the novel, Roark and Wynand engage in lengthy philosophical dialogues, and assume a dynamic similar to that of a teacher and student. Rand pictures the two against various idyllic backdrops, Roark explaining the tenets of individualism and even giving demonstrations: "Roark got up, reached out, tore a thick branch off a tree...[and] bent the branch slowly into an arc. 'Now I can make what I want of it: a bow, a spear, a cane, a railing. That's the meaning of life'" (Rand 551). Rand uses Roark's voice here as a conduit for her own ideas on the individual's work as the meaning of his or her life. Though Wynand ultimately fails to liberate himself from the grasp of the mundane world, his relationship with Roark demonstrates the centrality of Roark's character as the fountainhead from which the novel's individualistic ideology flows.

Over the course of the novel, Roark accumulates a ragtag band of followers, including Mike Donnigan, Roger Enright, and Steven Mallory. Not only does Roark's circle of individualists look up to him for leadership; he feels a desire to protect and uplift them. Rand details Roark's feelings toward his followers most explicitly during his first meeting with Stephen Mallory: "Roark stood over him, feeling a strange new thing, a desire to lift him in his arms and carry him to safety" (Rand 330). Even in his relationship with Peter Keating, Roark becomes a mentor: he attempts to transmit the ideology of individualism to the ultimately unsaveable Keating. Keating turns to Roark for advice at critical points in his life -- for instance,

he consults Roark on his decision to work for the architectural firm of Francon & Heyer after college, and later pleads with Roark to help him to design the Cosmo-Slotnick building and Cortlandt homes.

Roark's unified philosophy of individualism undergoes no changes, and encounters nothing which it cannot explain; it extends beyond the realm of architecture and across every aspect of his existence. Roark first voices his ideology of architecture during his conversation with the Dean of Stanton: "Here are my rules: what can be done with one substance must never be done with another... Nothing can be reasonable or beautiful unless it's made by one central idea, and the idea sets every detail. A building is alive, like a man. Its integrity is to follow its own truth, its one single theme, to serve its own single purpose" (Rand 24). Roark's architectural career is entirely driven by this aesthetic ideology; he refuses to create buildings which lack the integrity that he describes, even turning down the Manhattan Bank Company commission rather than, as the board of directors requests, making an "adaptation of the Classic motive to the facade" (Rand 196) of his design.

All aspects of Roark's character correspond to and even flow from the ideological framework of individualism. Roark's ideals of integrity and purpose, as detailed above, come to characterize not only his building style but also his personality, including his sense of fun. During his early architectural career, Roark encounters a group of raucous picnickers and internally remarks on the difference between their source of happiness, and his own: "These people were enjoying a day of their existence; they were shrieking to the sky their release from the work and the burdens of the days behind them; they had worked and carried the burdens in order to reach a goal -- and this was their goal... He thought that there was a difference, some

important difference, between the consciousness of this day in him and in them” (Rand 135).

Rand strikes a contrast here between the wanton joy of the picnickers, which derives from abandonment and release, and Roark’s joy, which derives from the fulfillment of his purpose.

Roark’s ideology mandates that his work should be the ultimate expression of joy; thus, any joy for joy’s own sake becomes meaningless in comparison to the joy of accomplishment.

Similarly, Roark develops friendships exclusively with individuals who share his philosophy and competence, and he seems only to experience complete relaxation and social enjoyment among this circle. Rand illustrates one of these rare moments through Dominique’s eyes, when she relaxes with Roark, Mike Donnigan, and Stephen Mallory after a day’s work on the Stoddard Temple: “Roark laughed as Dominique had never seen him laugh anywhere else, his mouth loose and young” (Rand 336). As Roark’s ideology rejects compromise, Roark can only derive a sense of social satisfaction in the company of those who share his sense of life.

Even Rand’s descriptions of Roark’s physical appearance relate to his framing ideology. She first describes Roark in the opening paragraphs of the novel, when he is pictured standing naked at the edge of a granite quarry: “His body leaned back against the sky. It was a body of long straight lines and angles, each curve broken into planes... His face was like a law of nature -- a thing one could not question, alter or implore. It had high cheekbones over gaunt, hollow cheeks; gray eyes, cold and steady; a contemptuous mouth, shut tight, the mouth of an executioner or a saint.” (Rand 15-16). Roark’s physical form adheres to the same rules of unity and integrity that characterize his buildings, and (in Rand’s view) that characterize his philosophy. To a greater degree than one’s social behavior or aesthetic convictions, one’s natural physical appearance is genetic and out of one’s control -- yet Roark so completely embodies the

ideology of individualism that even the blind force of genetics has contrived to formulate his appearance accordingly.

In conceiving of *The Fountainhead*, Rand was so insistent on the integrity of Roark's character that she thought him to be incapable of experiencing internal conflict. Rand comments on the integrity of her heroes' philosophies in *The Art of Fiction*:

My heroes... hold no contradictory values; it is through their friends, or the woman they love, that they are put into inner conflicts. The main line of the inner conflict of each concerns his (proper) love for a woman who, having not yet reached his level, is still in some way tied to the conventional world. Through her, the hero is thrown into conflict with a world *in which he now has something at stake* (Rand, *The Art of Fiction* 41).

Rand envisions the perfect human as a being completely devoid of contradiction; thus, she strives to ascribe complete ideological consistency to Roark. His lack of contradiction (if we believe that Rand was successful in her characterization) renders him incapable of generating any internal conflicts. Thus, Rand must use a secondary character (in this case, Dominique) in order to create a worldly conflict for her otherworldly hero.

This ideological framework which Roark possesses is sometimes described within the text as a force which he embodies. For Rand, individualism exists not only as a subjective paradigm through which to view the world, but as an objective and concrete force that acts within it. One of the most explicit references to Roark as an embodiment of individualism occurs when the villain Ellsworth Toohey first sets eyes upon him: "He did not know the man's name, his profession or his past; he had no need to know; it was not a man to him, but only a force; Toohey never saw men. Perhaps it was the fascination of seeing that particular force so explicitly personified in a human body" (Rand 262). Roark functions as a concretized personification of this force, so explicitly that other characters within the text recognize him as such. Rand bases

Roark's perfection upon the complete integration of the philosophy of individualism throughout all aspects of his character.

Nathaniel Branden quotes Rand on her character-building process: “‘Readers have asked me whether my characters are ‘copies of real people in public life’ or ‘not human beings at all, but symbols.’ Neither is true... What I did was to observe real life, analyze the reasons which make people such as they are, draw an abstraction and then create my own characters out of that abstraction’” (Branden, *Who is Ayn Rand?* 98). Rand does not intend Roark to function as an entirely realistic or human character, but rather as an embodiment of the abstract force of individualism.

Rand's modus operandi for building characters calls to mind E.M. Forster's discussion of “round” and “flat” characters in *Aspects of the Novel*. As per Forster's theory, flat characters are those which “are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. The really flat character can be expressed in one sentence” (Forster 68). Rand's characters can be neatly described in one sentence; sometimes in one word. Most novelists from Forster's time to the present would agree that a writer's use of flat characters should be limited; that they are intended mainly for caricature and not suited to play lead roles. However, Forster notes that

one great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever they come in -- recognized by the reader's emotional eye, not by the visual eye... They never need reintroducing, never run away, have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere... A second advantage is that they are easily remembered by the reader afterwards. They remain in his mind as unalterable as the reason that they were not changed by circumstances; they moved through circumstances, which gives them in retrospect a comforting quality, and preserves them when the book that produced them may decay (Forster 68-69).

Though flat characters may not possess the depth and dimensionality required to realistically portray human personalities, their simplified, streamlined nature can give them emotional pull, and make them memorable in the reader's mind. The impact of characters like Roark can be partially attributed to the emotional symbolism which they gain through stylistic integration (at the expense of complexity and realism). This is a crucial example of one of the ways in which Rand's "bad" writing style helps her to transmit her message.

Though Rand professed that Roark is not intended to represent a realistic human being, and that he should not be evaluated as such, she certainly seems (both in her authorial presence within *The Fountainhead*, and in her actions during her life) to have encouraged readers to base their behavior on Roark's. As discussed earlier, Rand upholds Roark as a wellspring of truth, knowledge, and morality throughout the text, and positions him as a mentor to her other characters. The text implicitly frames Roark as a philosophical guide for its readers, just as Rand seems to have explicitly framed him to her followers during her lifetime. According to Jeff Walker in *The Ayn Rand Cult*, "Students of Objectivism were recommended to ask 'What would John Galt, or Howard Roark, or any of the heroic characters in Rand's two major novels, do?' Discussions among Objectivists would often refer to these characters, as if they were simultaneously familiar acquaintances, oracles of profound wisdom, and perfect exemplars of all the virtues" (Walker 37). There is a strong tension between this encouragement to do as Roark would do, and the fact that Rand did not originally model him to resemble a realistic human being.

Throughout her written works, Rand renounces the Christian religion, collectivist ideology, and other doctrines because, in her view, they urge their followers to aspire to the

impossible, thus trapping people in a cycle of guilt when they inevitably fail to achieve their goal. However, many of Rand's followers seem to have experienced something similar in their pursuit of Roark-like perfection. Walker quotes Allan Blumenthal on the Objectivist guilt cycle: "Because they had learned the philosophy predominantly from fiction, the students of Objectivism thought they had to be like Ayn Rand heroes: they were not to be confused, not to be unhappy, and not to lack confidence. And because they could not meet these self-expectations, they bore the added burden of moral failure" (Walker 38). As Blumenthal relates, it is precisely because of the appealing performances of Rand's heroes in her fictional works that these students of Objectivism felt themselves under pressure to measure up; a non-fiction description of ideal human behavior in a philosophical tract would hardly have generated the same emotional response. Rand's use of integration in her characterization of Roark simultaneously relegates his character to the realm of the unreal, and, paradoxically, casts him as an ethical and behavioral role model.

While Howard Roark functions as Rand's embodiment of the force of individualism, Ellsworth Toohey functions as the ultimate human incarnation of collectivism. As with Roark, the various aspects of Toohey's character are integrated around this central theme. All of Toohey's opinions revolve around collectivist ideology; his philosophy of architecture, for example, focuses on the idea that "a great building is not the private invention of some genius or other. It is merely a condensation of the spirit of a people" (Rand 78). Of Toohey's tastes in literature, Rand tells us: "he leaned toward novels about the soil rather than the city, about the average rather than the gifted, about the sick rather than the healthy; there was a special glow in

his writing when he referred to stories about ‘little people’; ... he preferred novels without a plot and, above all, novels without a hero” (Rand 301). Toohey forms his various values and opinions with reference to collectivism, eternally concerned with the mass or the average person rather than the exceptional individual.

As with Roark, Toohey’s true nature is recognizable to more astute characters.

Dominique observes: ““You don’t meet perfection often this world one way or the other, do you? And he’s just that. Sheer perfection in his own way. Everyone else is so unfinished, broken up into so many different pieces that don’t fit together. But not Toohey. He’s a monolith”” (Rand 119). The complete integration of Toohey’s person around the central theme of collectivism is therefore apparent even within the world of the novel; just as Toohey recognizes Roark as a monolithic representation of the force of individualism, Dominique recognizes Toohey as a monolith of collectivism. Toohey is therefore established explicitly as the pole of collectivism, and becomes the fundamental opposite of Roark, who stands at the pole of individualism.

In *The Art of Fiction*, Rand comments on her technique of character integration: “Good characterization is not a matter of giving a character a single attribute or making him monotonous. It is a matter of integrating his every particular aspect to the total, the focus of integration being his basic premises” (Rand 67). Rand insists on integration as a vital force of character-building -- not only for protagonists, but for every character in a novel. In *The Fountainhead*, she makes a point to construct every character’s personality and physical appearance with reference to the philosophical opposition between individualism and collectivism. In Part II of the novel, Ellsworth Toohey posits that ““all things are simple when you reduce them to fundamentals. You’d be surprised if you knew how few fundamentals there

are. Only two, perhaps. To explain all of us” (Rand 278). This idea that any human being can be viewed in relation to his or her place within the individualist/collectivist binary (or the Roark/Toohey binary) guides Rand’s construction of character.

In order to portray the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism, Rand makes extensive use of imagery and caricature. The majority of the characters described in *The Fountainhead* are collectivist second-handers, and are given physical descriptions to match; the novel seems to revel in aesthetically unappealing descriptions of villainous characters’ looks. Of the wealthy investor Hopton Stoddard, Rand tells us: “His face was not disfigured; people merely thought it was, because it had a single expression: he smiled” (Rand 314). Stoddard’s smile here becomes a vile gesture of universal submission, mirroring Stoddard’s dependence on the approval of others for self-validation. Another particularly colorful description is that of Jules Fougler, whose person “[consists] of two sagging circles, a large one and a small one: the large one was his stomach, the small one -- his lower lip” (Rand 468). Rand’s use of imagery, though far from subtle, is certainly effective in its intense partnering of collectivism with repulsiveness.

Meanwhile, Rand uses imagery to link individualism with vitality and attractiveness. For example, Rand’s description of Roark’s employer and architectural mentor Henry Cameron insists on his aesthetic appeal (despite the fact that Cameron takes absolutely no care of himself): “The muscles of his short, thick neck bulged like ropes. He wore a white shirt with the sleeves rolled above the elbows; the bare arms were hard, heavy and brown... The eyes were dark, young, living” (Rand 47). Meanwhile, the brilliant young sculptor Stephen Mallory is described as “a gaunt young man [who] stood on the threshold; he had disheveled hair, a strong mouth with a square lower lip, and the most expressive eyes that Roark had ever seen” (Rand 325). Rand’s

heroes all possess physical qualities of the same strength, vibrancy, and rigidity that color other aspects of their personalities. Thus, using the logic of integration (which mirrors the logic of a fairy tale or allegory), Rand ascribes positive physical characteristics to individualist characters, and negative ones to collectivist characters; her imagery builds a sense of the vitality and power of individualist characters, and the repulsiveness and impotence of collectivist ones.

When Rand goes into further detail about the personalities of her collectivist characters, she makes a point to unite every aspect of these characters' persons around a single, specific theme. A vivid example of this technique is that of Lois Cook, one of Toohey's pet writers. Cook's physical description suggests an intentional, and even prideful untidiness: "she had a long, sallow face, and eyes set close together. Her hair hung about her ears in greasy strands. Her fingernails were broken. She looked offensively unkempt, with studied slovenliness as careful as grooming -- and for the same purpose" (Rand 239-240). This purposeful ugliness is the subset of collectivist ideology (as Rand conceptualizes it) that Rand uses as the center of Cook's character. Cook acknowledges this value in a speech to Peter Keating: "They all work so hard and struggle and suffer, trying to achieve beauty, trying to surpass one another in beauty. Let's surpass them all! Let's throw their sweat in their face. [...] Let's be ugly" (Rand 241).

Cook's various enterprises (minor details in the scheme of the novel) reflect her stated mission of intentional ugliness. Her book, *Clouds and Shrouds*, is a nonsensical jumble of words compiled with deliberate meaninglessness. When she offers Keating the commission of her New York residence, she announces: "I want it to be the ugliest house in New York" (Rand 241). Cook serves as a perfect example of Rand's technique of character integration because, although

she is a relatively minor character, every detail about her corresponds to the basic theme of her character.

The easiest critique of Rand's technique of integration would be that it lacks subtlety and dimensionality: that is, a character who is built using integration must be destined to be somewhat flattened and oversimplified. Rand anticipates and combats this critique in *The Art of Fiction*:

People who *can* think of essentials tell me that I write about the kind of men they see all over the place. A number of people have told me the names of architects I never heard of, swearing that I copied Peter Keating from them. You can see why. Since I present the essence of that which creates a second-hander like Keating, they can recognize in him many men who do not have his particular appearance, mannerisms, or personal problems, but who have the same essence (Rand, *The Art of Fiction* 76).

Rand believed that, although her characters do not resemble believable human individuals, they can represent a set of universal personalities, or *essentials*, that play out in the real world. Rand upholds this portrayal of the essential as the most important aspect of character-building. But this, in turn, represents a new problem: namely, that real human beings do not think, act, and exist upon a single premise, as Rand's characters do. The testimony in the above passage may not evidence the brilliance of Rand's characterization, so much as it illustrates the way in which Rand's writing can influence her readers' perspectives on the world around them.

Toward the end, when Roark's trial becomes the focus of public interest, Rand describes the kinds of people who denounce him, from "the society woman dressing for a charity bazaar, who dared not contemplate what means of self-expression would be left to her and how she could impose her ostentation on her friends, if charity were not the all-excusing virtue," (Rand 622) to "the social worker who had found no aim in life and could generate no aim from within the sterility of his soul, but basked in an unearned respect from all, by grace of his fingers on the

wounds of others” (Rand 622). Rand implies that anyone who takes issue with Roark’s actions must be a second-hander, guilty of moral treason.

According to Jeff Walker, Rand’s early circle of followers believed that “there had to be something mentally, morally wrong” (Walker 18-19) with anyone who did not embrace Objectivism, and denounced-opponents of Rand’s philosophy as “anti-reason and anti-reality” (Walker 19). These early followers took the logic of Rand’s characterization to heart, and applied it to their own lives. We can also observe this Randian logic at work in the “us versus them” rhetoric employed by Randian politicians. One notable example of this is Speaker of the House Paul Ryan’s separation of the American nation into two categories: the “makers” and the “takers” (Carter 1).

Rand’s technique of integration in her character-building process derives its power from its ability to reduce individuals down to fundamental concepts; this power can be used to justify any perspective. A student receiving a poor grade on an assignment might seek comfort by imagining his or her professor to be philosophically misguided and thus incapable of recognizing any work of true value. A politician seeking to preserve the status quo of a system that exploits disadvantaged people might decide that these people are guilty of some shortcoming that justifies their position. *The Fountainhead* provides a framework for viewing the world that can define any conflict by casting the viewer as a heroic rebel, and any opposition as villainous and tyrannous. This framework is seductive; both easy to grasp and easy to apply to personal and social situations.

The applicability of Rand’s moral framework helps to account for its appeal to adolescents and young adults. Jeff Walker quotes Rand critic Robert Hunt on this phenomenon,

suggesting that Rand's fiction thrives on the "“fervent elitism of adolescence”" (Walker 11).

Rand's ideology can be co-opted and used to frame the reader as a Roarkian figure at odds with and above society. It seems only logical, then, that this ideology should appeal to adolescent insecurity. Walker comments on the psychological mindset of Rand's early followers:

“Objectivists weren't comfortable with their own emotionality, so they viewed it in terms of Rand's ideas” (Walker 132). Though *The Fountainhead*, like Rand's other novels, espouses reason as the highest human function, its ideology seems to have gained large-scale popularity at least in part because of its emotional appeal. Rand's moral framework is an apparently rational structure through which readers can subvert emotions that make them feel small.

Though the concept of integrated characterization suggests that all characters should be devoid of conflict, Rand asserts that “a character can have enormous conflicts and contradictions -- but then *these* have to be consistent... For instance, there are contradictions in Gail Wynand's actions throughout *The Fountainhead*, but these contradictions are integrated to their ultimate root” (Rand, *The Art of Fiction* 60). For Rand, integrated characterization can support internal conflict, as long as the conflict generates from a character's essential theme.

Rand constructed Roark deliberately as a character devoid of contradiction, but many of the other personalities in *The Fountainhead* struggle with internal schisms. As discussed above, Dominique Francon's passion for people and objects of integrity clashes with her disdain for the world at large, which, she believes, corrupts integrity. Similarly, Keating often feels himself to be torn between his admiration for Roark and his fear of alienating others.

In the above quote on contradiction, Rand names Gail Wynand as an example of an internally conflicted character. Though Wynand contains contradictions, Rand insists (both explicitly in her writings, and implicitly throughout the novel itself) that the origins of his internal conflict can be traced back to the single, unifying theme of his character. Rand summarizes her conception of Wynand in her early notes on *The Fountainhead*: “He has lived according to Toohey all his life and has never believed in it. He is only too ready for Roark and knows the moment he meets him. His story is the conscious struggle against the Roark principle, only to surrender to it in the end” (Rand, *The Journals of Ayn Rand* 180). Finding fault with the world of second-handers, Wynand decides to harness its shortcomings, using the *Banner* as a vehicle to amass power. In so doing, however, Wynand hands over his soul to the whims of the masses, and commits high treason against Roark’s ideology.

Many of the details imparted about Wynand’s life symbolize the sacrifice of his soul to the world of the second-handers. Rand describes his bedroom as “a glass cage on the roof of the penthouse” (Rand 390). The description mirrors Wynand’s condition at this point in the novel: he has unknowingly trapped himself in his seat of power, which he believes gives him freedom, but which actually allows his soul to be totally permeated by society at large, as the bedroom (a notably intimate and personal setting) is permeated by the imagery of the city. As we follow Wynand’s movements in Part III, we see him speaking at a convention where he advocates careers for married women, then returning to his office, where he immediately signs off on an editorial vehemently opposing the same cause. (Rand 395) Wynand’s behavior here reflects the sacrifice of his will to the will of the people; he champions any opinion held by the public, with no regard for his own views.

The founding principle of Wynand's character also generates his ultimate collapse. One of his favorite pastimes is to hire writers of "immaculate integrity" (Rand 414) and prove them to be corruptible by financially enticing them to write stories that contradict their values. When Dominique inquires into Wynand's reasons for this, he replies: "Power, Dominique. The only thing I ever wanted. To know that there's not a man living whom I can't force to do -- anything. Anything I chose. The man I couldn't break would destroy me." (Rand 497) Wynand finds satisfaction in destroying the integrity of others (or proving that it did not exist in the first place) because it consolidates his worldview, in which true integrity is impossible to achieve. When Wynand encounters Roark, the ultimate man of integrity, he is forced to confront the fact that he has betrayed his highest value by assuming that it did not exist; hence, Wynand's downfall.

Conflicted between Roark's world and the world of the second-handers, Wynand orchestrates his own defeat. He is not the only character who suffers an unfortunate end because of conflict between individualism and collectivism: Peter Keating and Catherine Halsey both end up as lifeless shells of their former selves, as a consequence of their inability to seize their opportunity for individual happiness when it arises. However, as Stephen Cox points out, Wynand differs dramatically from these other characters: "Only Gail Wynand, in *The Fountainhead*, is allowed to develop the complex role of a good man who falls by his own error. Other 'good' characters... are usually maneuvered into mending their potentially fatal flaws. Characters who somehow fail to do so are usually discovered not to have been so good, or at least so bright, as one was led to think" (Cox, "Ayn Rand: Theory vs. Creative Life" 21).

Wynand's plight is the only one toward which Rand encourages us to feel sympathetic, rather than denunciatory. Even Roark (exemplifying what Rand considers to be ideal behavior)

parts respectfully with Wynand in the end, inclining his head to Wynand and “[holding] his head down a moment longer than a formal bow required” (Rand 692). The text allows Wynand to become a tragic hero, who sins and receives his punishment without decisive moral judgment from the text. He escapes Rand’s moral binary, and becomes a tragic casualty of the battle between individualism and collectivism -- and a living example of the damage that the collectivist establishment can inflict upon great souls. Rand diverges from her usual characterization scheme in Wynand, and capitalizes on the emotional elements of his story.

Rand’s early notes for *The Fountainhead* include plans for a character named Vesta Dunning, a young actress who has an affair with Roark in the early stages of the novel. In the introduction to the excerpts of *The Fountainhead* published in *The Early Ayn Rand*, Leonard Peikoff discusses the character: “Vesta Dunning is an eloquent example of a person of ‘mixed premises,’ to use a term of Ayn Rand’s. In part, Vesta shares Howard Roark’s view of life; in part, she is a secondhand, willing to prostitute her talent in order to win the approval of others, a policy she tries to defend as a means to a noble end.” (Rand, *The Early Ayn Rand* 335) In a series of excluded scenes between Vesta and Roark, Vesta explains her ambitions: though she despises the mundane roles she is forced to perform in her early career, she plans to accrue fame in order to change the public taste. In Vesta’s own words:

...there are things that are normal and comfortable and easy, and that’s most of life for all of us. And then there are also things above it, things so much more than human, and not many can bear it and then not often, but that’s the only reason for living at all. Things that can make you very quiet and still and it’s difficult to breathe. Can I explain that to the people who’ve never seen it? Can I show it to them? Can I? That’s what I’ll do someday with her, with Joan d’Arc, to make them look up” (Rand, *The Early Ayn Rand* 357).

Vesta dreams of bringing an appreciation of true beauty to the masses through her dramatic portrayal of Joan of Arc, the Roman Catholic saint and heroine of France; she resembles Wynand

insofar as both characters attempt to harness public opinion to achieve success. In fact, according to Peikoff, “Miss Rand cut Vesta from the novel... when she realized that there was too great a similarity between Vesta and Gail Wynand” (Rand, *The Early Ayn Rand* 335).

Crucially, however, Vesta’s interest in public opinion extends further than Wynand’s in that she receives personal validation from the praise of reviewers. In one of the excluded scenes, Rand describes Vesta’s reaction to a positive review in a newspaper:

Vesta cut the review out of the paper and carried it about with her for weeks; she would take it out of her bag, in Roark’s room, and spread it on the floor and sit before it, her chin in her hands, her eyes glowing; until, one night, he kicked it with his foot from under her face and across the room. ‘You’re disgusting,’ he said. ‘Why concern yourself over something someone said about you?’ (Rand, *The Early Ayn Rand* 346).

Vesta is more connected to the world of the second-handers than any of *The Fountainhead*’s other individualists: she recognizes its flaws, yet she is able to relate positively and sincerely to it. This shortcoming, “disgusting” to Roark, was apparently grave enough to warrant a death sentence: in her early outlines of *The Fountainhead*, Rand planned for Vesta to commit suicide. (Rand, *The Journals of Ayn Rand* 101) Perhaps this fatal flaw of Vesta’s was also the real reason for Rand’s ultimate omission of the character: after all, Vesta’s personal interest in reviews conflicts with the stated mission of her character (which is to use public opinion only in order to achieve success). Rand may have recognized this incongruity in the character, and accordingly abandoned her as an incompletely-integrated scrap.

Vesta’s similarity to Wynand seems an unsatisfying explanation for her omission; after all, it is widely recognized that there are dozens of characters throughout Rand’s novels who are almost identical to each other. A more likely explanation for the omission is that Vesta interrupts the novel’s standard interplay between individualism and collectivism: rather than representing a

conflict between the two camps, Vesta represents a possibility for cooperation and resolution between them. By investing herself in the world of the second-handers, but maintaining her individualist values, Vesta bridges the gap between the two worlds in a way that is not conflicted at all, but peaceful. While optimistic, the possibility of reconciliation that Vesta represents threatens the worldview espoused throughout the novel, which maintains firmly that the individualists and the collectivists are destined to an eternal struggle. The removal of Vesta from the novel solidifies this message, and restores thematic integrity. The ghost of Vesta Dunning teaches us about the importance of character integration to the theme and impact of Rand's work.

Constructing Good and Evil

The Fountainhead also draws significant power from the way it represents and codes good and evil. Rand employs three main devices in her construction of good and evil: she uses the voices of various characters to identify elements of good and evil within the text; she tracks the development of characters over time in order to demonstrate the effects of evil; and she dramatizes Toohey's character in order to pair collectivism with archetypal aesthetics of evil. All of these devices function by subverting traditional moral iconography: Rand overturns established moral dynamics such as the nature of good and evil, of selfishness and selflessness, profiting from the potency of preexisting concepts in our collective imagination, even as she seeks to redefine them.

Rand uses the voices of various characters to construct the text's understanding of good and evil. All of Rand's individualists, and some of her collectivists, interpret the world around

them through a uniform moral philosophy and set of metaphors; these characters tend to reach some form of the same conclusion, namely, that Roark represents the force of good and Toohy the force of evil. The individualist characters' reflections upon the nature of good and evil often both employ the potency, and rework the specific meanings, of preexisting moral concepts.

Henry Cameron is the first character to allude to this idea of Roark as an eternal force of good. As he tells Roark on his deathbed:

All the pain [on earth] comes from that thing you are going to face. I don't know what it is, I don't know why it should be unleashed against you. I know only that it will be. And I know that if you carry these words through to the end, it will be a victory, Howard, not just for you, but for something that should win, that moves the world -- and never wins acknowledgment. It will vindicate so many who have fallen before you, who have suffered as you will suffer (Rand 133).

Cameron describes Roark as a hero destined to stand up against the forces of evil. The passage deploys dramatic imagery and diction to elevate Roark's battle from the relatively mundane world of architecture to the realm of abstract good and evil. Rand uses the vocabulary of warfare, invoking climactic words like "victory," and dramatic images such as that of the force of evil being "unleashed against" Roark. These choices of diction represent Roark's personal struggle as a physical war. Meanwhile, the image of Roark's predecessors as "fallen" heroes adds to the drama of the metaphor.

Roark's sense of the philosophical scale of his conflict with Toohy grows throughout the novel; most dramatically, Roark recognizes the importance of his battle when he meets Stephen Mallory for the first time. Mallory's living conditions are dismal; he has been all but destroyed by the world of the second-handers. Rand gives us a rare glimpse into Roark's inner monologue as he watches the despairing Mallory: "this is how men feel, trapped in a shell hole; this room is not an accident of poverty, it's the footprint of a war; it's the devastation torn by explosives more

vicious than any stored in the arsenals of the world” (Rand 330). Rand continues the battlefield metaphor, using Mallory to exemplify the casualties of the philosophical conflict between the individualists and collectivists. Mallory illustrates the damage that the world of the second-handers inflicts upon genius, generating audience sympathy for the individualists. Mallory’s function here is to encourage Rand’s audience to view the collectivists as a repugnant force of evil.

Later, Rand uses Mallory’s voice to further dramatize the struggle of the individualists against the collectivist establishment. Objecting to the injustices of the collectivists against Roark, Mallory declares:

What do the damn fools think of as horror? Wars, murders, fires, earthquakes? To hell with that! *This* is horror... That’s what men should dread and fight and scream about and call the worst shame on their record. Howard, I’m thinking about all the explanations of evil and all the remedies offered for it through the centuries. None of them worked. None of them explained or cured anything. But the root of evil... it’s there (Rand 511).

Through Mallory’s voice, Rand constructs the order of *The Fountainhead*’s moral universe, in which the plight of unrecognized genius, not “wars, murders, fires, earthquakes,” is cast as the ultimate horror of the human experience. Mallory pointedly rejects the various understandings of evil that have cropped up throughout human history, asserting that collectivism is the true “the root of evil.” Meanwhile, Rand employs the authority of religious moral concepts through Mallory’s indirect references to religious “explanations of evil and... remedies offered for it.” She draws on the well-established emotionality of religious concepts, building the monstrosity of collectivism by equating it with religious evil.

Other characters recognize this moral ordering in the world of the text: Dominique reflects once that “there had always been a God and a Devil -- only men had been so mistaken

about the shapes of their Devil -- he was not single and big, he was many and smutty and small” (Rand 492). Rand uses Dominique’s inner voice here to recast good and evil, rejecting the forms that they have been given by religion and attributing Rand’s values to them instead. Rand employs religious imagery even more directly here, referring specifically to the Christian God and Devil, and thus subverting preexisting feelings regarding both figures toward individualism and collectivism.

By using the voices of various characters to construct the text’s values of good and evil, Rand builds a sense of the objective reality of these values as they are understood within the text. Cameron, Roark, Mallory, and Dominique (as well as countless others, including the occasional collectivist) respond to the events of the novel in the same way, and reach almost identical moral conclusion regarding their world; any characters who fail to recognize the individualists’ moral order are either brutally punished by the text (Peter Keating and Catherine Halsey) or judged by it to be inferior beings (Kiki Holcombe, for one). Rand points us toward the conclusion that the individualists’ understanding of morality is the objectively *correct* one.

This sense of certainty increases the power of Rand’s moral binary as a descriptive tool for understanding the world: Rand’s insistence upon the objective correctness of her individualist characters can become a reason for her readers to be equally as certain of her philosophy. According to Jeff Walker’s analysis of Objectivism during Rand’s lifetime, early fans were drawn to the philosophy at least in part by this projected sense of certainty. As Walker asserts: “recruits learned the Objectivist line on these subject areas, and then, perhaps, began to learn a little about them” (Walker 12). Objectivism provided its early proponents with an easily navigable and apparently universally applicable set of beliefs; followers could learn and apply

this set of beliefs, and enjoy a resulting feeling of command over a wide range of subject areas and spheres of life.

In order to lend physicality and drama to *The Fountainhead's* force of evil, Rand outlines the development of various characters under the influence of this evil. Perhaps the most colorful example of this device is Rand's portrayal of Catherine Halsey, a love interest of Peter Keating's who, over the course of the novel, becomes attracted to and consequently destroyed by Toohey's ideology. Rand depicts Catherine as a victim of collectivism, and uses her plight to illustrate the harm that the ideology inflicts (in Rand's view) upon its proponents. By depicting the falls of such characters, Rand concretizes the abstract danger that collectivism poses.

Early in the novel, Keating catches a glimpse of Catherine Halsey as she listens to Toohey deliver a speech. As Toohey urges the crowd to surrender their individual egos, and to merge themselves "in a great current, in the rising tide which is approaching to sweep us all... into the future," (Rand 109) Keating perceives the change that this doctrine has already begun to effect in Catherine. He sees Catherine as "a white face dissolving into the sounds of the loudspeaker," (Rand 109) as if Catherine were surrendering her physical being to Toohey along with her soul. Rand uses this disturbing image of disintegration into the anonymous mass to illustrate the abstract danger of losing one's soul to the mob as a physical reality. The physical image of Catherine's face serves as a stand-in for her soul; through this metaphor, Rand dramatizes both the idea of losing one's soul and the frightening danger of Toohey's methods.

Importantly, the effect of Toohey's ideology on Catherine is assessed not by Roark or Dominique, who explicitly understand the philosophical processes played out in the world of the

novel, but by Keating, a relatively limited and timid observer who cannot help absorbing a sense of this overarching process, despite his inability to recognize it intellectually. Keating cannot attribute this visual phenomenon to its proper cause, but his experience of it elevates its status to an objective plane. Toohey's war occurs not only through philosophical abstraction, but also in the lives of the characters, and its casualties are objectively perceptible not only to the other generals, but also to foot-soldiers like Keating.

By the end, Catherine has entirely submerged herself in her career as a social worker, and in Toohey's collectivist philosophy. As Toohey advises Catherine, "only when [the ego] is dead, when you care no longer, when you have lost your identity and forgotten the name of your soul -- only then will you know the kind of happiness I spoke about, and the gates of spiritual grandeur will fall open for you" (Rand 365). Rand demonstrates the consequences of living according to this mantra in her later depictions of Catherine. Her physical appearance comes to reflect the empty, wasted state of her soul. In our last glimpses of Catherine, Rand describes her physical person as "slumped" (Rand 359) and "lifeless," (Rand 359); Keating, shocked by Catherine's deterioration, notes that "at twenty-six she looked like a woman trying to hide the fact of being over thirty" (Rand 359). Rand parallels Catherine's physical development with the corruption of her soul under Toohey's care.

Meanwhile, Rand reveals the emotional toll of a collectivism-based life through Catherine's dialogue. As she confesses to Keating, "the only emotion I've felt for years is being tired" (Rand 362). As Catherine works to break down her ego to achieve the happiness that Toohey promises, she finds herself becoming -- not happy -- but more and more exhausted and unfeeling, "as if there were nobody there to feel anymore" (Rand 362). Rand suggests that

Catherine is becoming literally selfless; that, by following Toohey's doctrine, she has effectively destroyed her soul. Catherine's descent into selflessness has also affected her feelings toward others. In Catherine's words: "I'm beginning to hate people... I expect people to be grateful to me... I find myself pleased when slum people bow and scrape and fawn over me. I find myself liking only those who are servile" (Rand 362). Toohey's doctrine has corrupted the goodwill and empathy in Catherine that originally attracted her to the ideology.

Rand uses imagery and dialogue to construct a sense of the progression of Catherine's life that mirrors Rand's theoretical ideas about the effects of collectivist ideology upon the human soul. Rand bolsters her argument against collectivism by asserting its harmfulness, not only to society as a whole (which we see in the establishment's attempted destruction of Mallory's career, for instance), but also upon its individual agents. This portrayal adds another facet to Rand's attack on collectivism: by engaging with collectivist establishments, one risks doing harm not only to the general public or to some hypothetical, cloistered genius like Mallory -- but also directly to oneself. By this logic, acts of charity that may seem harmless or even beneficial to the public should be mistrusted, for they corrupt the souls of those who perform them. If Rand had omitted this element of *The Fountainhead's* argument, the question of the morality of charitable acts toward others might be left uncertain. However, using the example of Catherine Halsey, Rand rounds out her attack against all forms of charity by explaining its psychological causes and effects.

Another key element in Rand's construction of good and evil is her representation of Toohey as a villain. Rand uses cinematic imagery to portray the larger danger that he represents,

and to connect him to this abstract danger. The most dramatic example of such imagery occurs when Catherine relives to Keating a sudden sensation of horror that came upon her on a peaceful evening in Toohey's household. Catherine, at this point devoted to assisting Toohey with his work, finds herself suddenly struck by a feeling of "mortal danger" (Rand 151). In a moment of subconscious, even instinctual, realization, Catherine becomes afraid of Toohey -- so afraid that she flees the house. In Catherine's words: "I couldn't see Uncle in the living room, but I saw his shadow on the wall, a huge shadow, all hunched, and it didn't move, only it was so huge!" (Rand 151) Toohey is projected as a gigantic shadow, representing the superhuman force that he casts upon the world. Through the monstrosity of the image, and Catherine's feeling of mortal terror in response, Rand magnifies Toohey into an embodiment of an abstract force of evil.

Catherine's inability to consciously connect her fear with its source makes Toohey's monstrous power more objectively real. Catherine does not share Roark's sensibilities; she lacks the sense, or inner strength, to logically interpret her feelings; she is sympathetic to Toohey's cause and to Toohey himself. However, even Catherine feels the effects of his evil, helpless though she is to attribute those effects to their cause. This subconscious recognition validates Rand's characterization of Toohey by suggesting that his monstrosity is a part of the objective reality of the novel's universe.

Rand also goes into detail about Toohey's psychology and motivations, and explicates the evil of his character. A crucial -- perhaps the crucial -- aspect of Rand's construction of this character is the fact that he understands the moral universe of *The Fountainhead* in Rand's terms, and commits his acts of evil with full consciousness of Rand's moral framework. Rand insists on this throughout the novel, via the narrator's voice and Toohey's dialogue. Toohey can be heard

to refer to the individualists as his “enemies,” (Rand 276) and the collectivists as his “own side” (Rand 276); he even calls himself “a general” (Rand 276).

Toohey’s language reflects his indisputable consciousness of his place within Rand’s moral binary; in his editorials, public speeches, and side-comments throughout the novel, he demonstrates a clear awareness of the force that he embodies, and of the ways in which his actions and person are aligned with an abstract philosophy.

Rand devotes an entire chapter of *The Fountainhead* to the exposition of Toohey’s psychology. This chapter focuses on his early life and development from childhood to adulthood. She describes the moment in which a young Toohey begins to conceptualize the purpose of his life: when a teacher presents the Biblical question: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Rand 298) and Toohey conjectures: “Then in order to be truly wealthy, a man should collect souls?” (Rand 298) Rand reveals that Toohey is intent upon destroying the souls of others, and that he pursues this end by subscribing individuals to the doctrine of selflessness, which is impossible to follow (Rand 635-637). His followers find themselves caught in a cycle of guilt and dependence, in which they learn to despise themselves for having selfish desires, and strive harder and harder to destroy the root of these desires (Rand 635-637). Toohey pursues his goal consciously, with full knowledge of its impact upon others, as evidenced by the fact that Toohey himself describes these processes to Keating.

Toohey is fully conscious of his own evils; he is a simple villain in the sense that he has no moral qualms about committing atrocities, and happily accepts the monstrosity of his actions. He is reminiscent of the archetypal movie villain who, upon capturing the hero, begins a long and gleeful tirade about his evil plottings. The extent of his evil demands outrage from the

reader; there is no room for compromise or cooperation with a character who consciously and pitilessly destroys the souls of others. Rand's characterization of Toohey intensifies the mobilizing power of *The Fountainhead* by picturing the enemies of Objectivism as cartoonish, albeit very real, villains who are motivated by a desire to harm others. By conceptualizing the enemy in this way, Rand allows an Objectivism-certified reason for us to forgo sympathy for, or ever cooperate with, her philosophical opponents. Rand's representation of evil actively encourages the ideological polarization of her followers against enemies of Objectivism.

Meanwhile, Rand's portrayal of *The Fountainhead*'s moral binary, and particularly her vilification of collectivism, forces readers to consider their own decisions using the individualist/collectivist framework, and accordingly make decisions about the way which they will live. The individualist/collectivist binary colors every aspect of life in *The Fountainhead*: every book, every building, every human being mentioned has a position on this spectrum. As Nathaniel Branden remarks: "you are left with this sort of picture with your life. You either choose to be rational or you don't. You're honest or you're not. You choose the right values or you don't. You like the kind of art Rand admires or your soul is in *big* trouble" (Branden, "The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand" 56). Rand injects her moral binary into every aspect of human life, forcing readers who take her seriously to consider all of their tastes and decisions with reference to her terms.

CHAPTER TWO: ON *ATLAS SHRUGGED* AND PLOT

Rand devoted almost a decade to the writing of *Atlas Shrugged*, and viewed the novel as the culmination of her work and the ultimate embodiment of her philosophy. Rand and her followers had high hopes for its success and influence: Nathaniel Branden recalls Leonard Peikoff's extravagant predictions of "the conversion of the country to laissez-faire capitalism and the ideas of individualism 'within a year of the publication of the novel'" (Branden, *Judgment Day* 186). Though Branden qualifies this anecdote with an assurance that Rand's expectations were not quite so exaggerated, his recollections make Rand's view of *Atlas Shrugged* clear: according to Branden, Rand once replied to an editor's suggestion that she cut Galt's prolific speech "with the question, 'Would you cut the Bible?'" (Branden, *Judgment Day* 225).

Atlas Shrugged chronicles the adventures of Dagny Taggart and Henry Rearden, two fabulously wealthy capitalists who must keep their businesses (Taggart Transcontinental and Rearden Steel, respectively) running despite complications caused by their society's increasing turn to leftist political ideology. Dagny and Rearden watch in confusion as other prominent industrialists and competent lower-level workers gradually begin to vanish around them. Finally, they learn that a brilliant inventor named John Galt has been recruiting the country's best minds, and convincing them to go on strike against their society -- which, according to Galt, wishes to punish them for their success. Dagny and Rearden find themselves caught between the world of the "looters," who prey on the brilliance of great minds, and Galt's team of capitalists, who plan to watch the looters' world collapse upon itself in their absence, and then rebuild it as they desire.

Many of the character prototypes, general themes, and forms of conflict from *The Fountainhead* reappear in *Atlas Shrugged*. However, the novels differ from each other in several important ways. For one, the tone of *Atlas Shrugged* is even more moralizing than that of *The Fountainhead*. Jeff Walker notes that the word “evil” appears, on average, once on every 4.9 of the novel’s hefty 1,074 pages (Walker 102). Also, while *The Fountainhead* chiefly concerns itself with aesthetic philosophy, *Atlas Shrugged* engages much more directly with politics and economics. Finally, *Atlas Shrugged* is more plot-driven than its predecessor: while *The Fountainhead* orients itself largely around the lives of its characters and their interior worlds, *Atlas Shrugged* focuses more on action that occurs in the exterior world.

If the critical reaction to *The Fountainhead* was ambivalent, the reaction to *Atlas Shrugged* was downright hostile. Branden remembers and reflects on the reception to the novel: “the attacks significantly outnumbered the raves. The negative reviews echoed the same kind of ferocious animosity I had seen in the New York publications, sometimes using the same language. It was as if there was an invisible network, and every wire was transmitting the same message: *Stop Ayn Rand*” (Branden, *Judgment Day* 232).

While critics remained skeptical about Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* quickly amassed an enormous public following. Branden recalls that during “the year following *Atlas*’ publication, Ayn began to receive extraordinary quantities of fan mail” (Branden, *Judgment Day* 259). The novel quickly took on the same sort of significance for Rand’s Objectivists that the Bible holds for Christians. Jeff Walker writes that, “just as Christian fundamentalists are exhorted to read the Bible every day, students of Objectivism were expected to keep rereading *Atlas Shrugged* for the rest of their lives... [One follower] remembers being chided for not rereading Rand, by someone

who boasted that he had already thrilled to *Atlas Shrugged* 35 times” (Walker 37). *Atlas Shrugged* has sustained a popular fan-base for decades, and has sold 8.8 million copies worldwide since its initial publication (“Novels & Works of Ayn Rand”).

Meanwhile, prominent conservative thinkers have been citing Rand, and specifically *Atlas Shrugged*, as an influence for decades -- sometimes with disastrous consequences. Adam Weiner discusses Rand’s influence on former Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, noting that it was Greenspan’s “Randian belief in a free marketplace, regulated only by the self-interest and rational business decisions of capitalists” (Weiner 12) that guided his calls for drastic deregulation. Though the novel has received little academic attention since its publication, its influence upon American society has been extensive.

The Ayn Rand Institute’s webpage raises and responds to the underlying question that I address in this chapter: “With adoring fans, rabid critics and very few in between, why does *Atlas Shrugged* evoke such impassioned responses? Because it grapples with the fundamental problems of human existence — and presents radically new answers” (“Novels & Works of Ayn Rand”). Though *Atlas Shrugged* does grapple with important questions, Rand herself traces the lineage of her ideas back to thinkers from Aristotle to Adam Smith. Many of Rand’s ideas had been in circulation in the intellectual sphere for decades or centuries before she picked them up, so novelty alone cannot be responsible for the sustained cultural interest in her novels. Below, I will explore Rand’s expository methods in the plot of *Atlas Shrugged*, and explain how certain elements of the plot contribute to the overall power of the novel.

A Sense of Doom

Rand sets the action of *Atlas Shrugged* in a slightly altered version of her contemporary American world. Rand's analog world is one steadily succumbing to communism: characters consistently reference countries such as The People's State of Mexico, and The People's State of England. By the end of the novel, the United States is the only country that has not become a People's State, a lone beacon of capitalism in a weltering, communist sea. For Rand, this turn to communism implies the end of the world: she illustrates what she views to be the inherent dangers of leftist influence upon governments by tracking the demise of order in the world of *Atlas Shrugged*.

At the beginning of the novel, Rand builds an ambient sense of fear. In the opening pages, we meet Eddie Willers, loyal employee to Taggart Transcontinental and stooge to Dagny Taggart. Eddie ambles through the streets, "wondering why he always felt it at this time of day, this sense of dread without reason. No, he thought, not dread, there's nothing to fear: just an immense, diffused apprehension, with no source or object" (Rand 11). From the start, a nameless, nebulous terror hangs upon the city. Rand casts Eddie Willers as the ideal everyman: though not extraordinary like Rand's heroes, Eddie is a competent worker; he is passionate about his company's legacy and success; he worships Dagny Taggart and Francisco d'Anconia for their superior abilities and intellects. Essentially, Eddie is the best of what Rand would consider to be common people.

Eddie's apprehension can be assumed to represent a general sentiment shared by the masses. Indeed, Rand provides glimpses of others affected by the atmosphere of dread. At a

society party, Dagny overhears a woman's similar confession: "I am not afraid of prowlers or robberies or anything of the sort. But I stay awake all night. I fall asleep only when I see the sky turning pale. It is very odd. Every evening, when it grows dark, I get the feeling that this time it is final, that daylight will not return" (Rand 145). As Dagny listens, another partygoer replies that her cousin in Maine has reported identical feelings. Meanwhile, a newsstand owner at the Taggart Terminal remarks to Dagny: "[People] used to rush through here, and it was wonderful to watch, it was the hurry of men who knew where they were going and were eager to get there. Now they're hurrying because they're afraid... And I don't think they know what it is they want to escape... I don't know what it is that's happening to the world" (Rand 64). Through multiple voices, Rand constructs an overhanging, pervasive atmosphere of apprehension and fear, foreshadowing the dark turn that her world is about to take.

Our first glimpses of New York City are similarly foreboding: as we follow Eddie Willers through the city in the opening pages, the narrator describes a feature of the city's skyline: "A jagged object cut the sky above the roofs; it was half a spire, still holding the glow of the sunset; the gold leaf had long since peeled off the other half. The glow was red and still, like the reflection of a fire: not an active fire, but a dying one which it is too late to stop" (Rand 12). Rand illustrates the city's physical dereliction via the image of the peeling gold leaf, and looks ahead to its collapse via the suggestion of a dying fire. This symbolic foreshadowing adds to the apocalyptic atmosphere of the narrative, building tension and urgency.

The overhanging aura of fear in *Atlas Shrugged* is characteristic not only of Rand's fictional work, but of her way of thinking about the real world and her own place in it. Rand often launches into alarmist diatribes in her nonfiction works, many of which are echoed by the

characters in her novels. Rand believed that the world was literally hurtling toward disaster; that art, culture, and government were crumbling, and Western society was in real danger of plummeting into darkness, just as the society of *Atlas Shrugged* does. There is an entire chapter of *The Romantic Manifesto* titled “The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age,” in which Rand rails against contemporary aesthetic values and mourns the demise of what she considers to be real art and literature.

In an earlier chapter, she describes the halting progress of human society as she sees it: “Mankind moves forward by the grace of those human bridges who are able to grasp and transmit, across years or centuries, the achievements men had reached -- and to carry them further” (Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* 10). Rand believed herself to be one of these bridges, a transmitter of culture and values, almost a prophet. The stakes of her mission were severe: she urges the world to receive her philosophical transmissions, and to return to logic and true aesthetics, “before the barbarian curtain descends altogether (if it does) and the last memory of man’s greatness vanishes in another Dark Ages” (Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* 10).

According to Jeff Walker, Rand’s sense of imminent doom infected early readers of *Atlas Shrugged*, who grew to feel, much as Rand did, that her work represented humanity’s only chance at survival. Walker cites Leonard Peikoff, Rand’s intellectual heir: “Peikoff said in the 1980s, ‘If we fail’ at carrying Rand’s legacy into the future ‘there will be no future for us or mankind... I think there is still time. Despite everything we have against us, we can see to it that Ayn Rand’s ideas *do* save the world” (Walker 64). John Ridpath, currently active Objectivist intellectual and intellectual historian, has similar views: ““there is *no* chance that we will have a capitalist future without [Rand’s discoveries].”” (Walker 64). Meanwhile, Senator Ron Johnson

has called the novel ““a warning of what could happen to America”” (Weiner 19). From the early days of Rand’s inner circle to the present, the sense of urgency and imminent doom -- which lingers ever-present in *Atlas Shrugged* as well as Rand’s nonfiction work -- has shown a tendency to take root in the minds of her dedicated readers.

As the government in *Atlas Shrugged*, led by a circle of incompetents, pursues more and more leftist policies, and cracks down harder and harder on industrialists and the free market, Rand cashes in on her carefully constructed sense of country-wide foreboding: she begins to tear the world apart. As the industrialists withdraw to Galt’s Gulch, abandoning a world which they believe to be abusing them, they leave disaster in their wake. Rand begins her industrial apocalypse with hints at “the shrinking diet, the falling temperature and the cracking roofs in the homes of the nation” (Rand 442). Soon, the People’s States all over the world are collapsing, and the United States begins funneling its resources toward their aid, allowing its industries to suffer as a consequence. In one instance, this appropriation of industrial resources causes a delay in the Taggart Transcontinental train schedule, which in turn causes a shipment of food to spoil and its producers to go out of business (Rand 460-462). Through examples such as these (which litter the second half of *Atlas Shrugged*), Rand attempts to illustrate her philosophical and political principles in action. Leftist policies and humanitarian efforts consistently produce adverse effects, and result in turbulence and turmoil; this mismanagement and consequential state of disaster is, in Rand’s view, what a world left to the collectivists would look like.

Toward the end, Rand’s fictional world descends into utter chaos. The narrator describes “districts that rose in blind rebellion, arrested the local officials, expelled the agents of

Washington, killed the tax collectors... went on to seize all property within their reach, to declare community bondage of all to all, and to perish within a week, their meager loot consumed, in the bloody hatred of all for all, in the chaos of no rules save that of the gun” (Rand 922). Law and order completely breaks down, and the government is left with no means of controlling its desperate citizens: “No action could be taken when mobs of starving people attacked warehouses on the outskirts of cities. No action could be taken when punitive squadrons joined the people they had been sent to punish” (Rand 995). Having failed its citizens, the government disintegrates; a mob rule based on fear and necessity prevails.

The world plunges into darkness, and its inhabitants are forced to revert to frontier lifestyles in order to survive. The narrator tells of “whispered rumors of covered wagons traveling by night through abandoned trails, and of secret settlements armed to resist... the attacks of any looting savages, be they homeless mobs or government agents” (Rand 995). America spirals backward into a state of retrograde, and its citizens are forced to live as early European explorers in the region might have. (The implication that Native Americans were the original looters in the early American West is typical of Rand’s style of thought, which sympathizes only with the advantaged; Rand infamously defended the genocide and marginalization of Native Americans (Norton).)

Rand conjures these images of instability, violence, and retrogression to illustrate the consequences of a government dominated by leftist, collectivist thought and anti-competitive policy. The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is little more than a demonstration of Rand’s philosophical and political precepts in action. The plot empowers Rand’s philosophy in the sense that it *seems* to prove Rand’s principles work in practice. However, as Rand’s fictional world is constructed

upon her philosophical premises, and as such is not a direct reflection of the real world, the cause-and-effect logic of events that occur within it is not necessarily the same as the logic of the real world.

This is one of the reasons why Rand's fiction can accomplish what her nonfiction treatises cannot. As Rand herself asserts in *The Romantic Manifesto*, "The primary purpose of an airplane is not to *teach* man to fly, but to give him the actual experience of flying. So is the primary purpose of an art work" (Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* 171). *Atlas Shrugged* does more than simply teach Rand's ideas to its readers: it allows them to experience her ideas in practice; to live within a world that resembles our own, but operates entirely upon Rand's philosophy. The experience of flying this particular airplane captivated Rand's early readers: for them, Rand's work struck the perfect balance between realism and idealism. As Jeff Walker explains, many of these readers found Rand's work preferable to the real world that they inhabited, and withdrew over time into the novel:

Atlas Shrugged was not just a sacred text: it was an alternative reality into which Rand and her most dedicated followers disappeared... Looking back in 1996, Nathaniel Branden maintained that the 1960s Objectivists lived in the world of Rand's novels. "We sure as heck didn't exist in the real world." They experienced events in Rand's novels as if they were as real as anything in the real world, and they experienced day-to-day events in the real world in the context of Rand's novels (Walker 37-38).

There is an interesting tension between the Objectivists' withdrawal into the world of *Atlas Shrugged* as a more worthy realm of existence, and their insistence that the theories exhibited in the novel can describe or explain the real world. Perhaps Rand's followers wished to reconstruct the real world in the image of her superior one -- or perhaps the logical schema of Rand's constructed world masquerades itself so impressively as real that readers mistake Rand's laws of gravity for the real thing.

Strawmen and False Premises

Rather than arguing against real-life intellectual opponents, Rand constructs textual versions to represent them in her fictional works. While Rand's heroes faithfully espouse her philosophy and demonstrate its practical applications in their lives, her villains (collectivists, politicians, lobbyists, and anti-empiricists) serve to illustrate what Rand views as *the wrong*. They create conflicts and obstacles for her heroes to surmount; and they give voice to philosophical, political, economic, and aesthetic views that Rand opposes, so that she can both symbolically dismantle them through plot events, and directly dismantle them through dialogues.

Though Rand intends her villains to represent her real-life philosophical opposition, the ideas that they voice often have little in common with those generally held by the collectivists, etc., that Rand wishes to attack. Albert Ellis notes that Objectivists in general "have a remarkable penchant for setting up strawmen, by claiming that their opponents believe in all kinds of things in which they really do not believe, and then enthusiastically knocking down these setups" (Ellis 114). Rand often oversimplifies, and even completely misrepresents, the beliefs of her philosophical opponents, so that they end up embodying -- not collectivism -- but a separate, mythical school of thought. This misrepresentation makes it much easier for Rand's heroes to triumph over her villains, building a sense of their *rightness* by casting their opponents as anti-life, anti-logic, and so on.

The heroes of *Atlas Shrugged* are almost exclusively upper-class businesspeople: the novel's main characters are Dagny Taggart, heiress to and Vice-President of the Taggart Transcontinental railroad company, and Henry Rearden, steel tycoon and genius inventor of

Rearden Metal. The novel's villains are largely politicians and lobbyists, and their dastardly plans mainly consist of regulatory laws. The attitude of many of these villains, and of the general public, is one of resentment and enmity toward successful businesspeople. In his discussion of Objectivists' use of strawman tactics, Albert Ellis quotes Rand's claim that "'today's 'liberals' consider a businessman guilty in any conflict with a labor union, regardless of the facts or issues involved'" (Ellis 114-115) and points out that "ironically enough, most of the 'liberals' that Miss Rand is talking about *are* or aspire to be businessmen... And most of them are opposed to *some*, but hardly *all*, the practices of businessmen" (Ellis 115). Rand's misinformed conviction that all liberals resent and despise all businesspeople lives at the root of her villains' actions. It reveals itself especially opaquely in the villains' relentless and increasingly personal attacks on Henry Rearden for the success of his ingenious Rearden Metal.

Throughout the novel, major turning points occur as the villains pass acts of restrictive legislature, such as the Anti Dog-Eat-Dog Rule and the Equalization of Opportunity Bill. The heroes of the novel regard these acts as signs of the country's imminent collapse, and struggle to keep producing despite the increasingly suffocating measures. Meanwhile, the press (standing in for public opinion) asserts that "at a time of dwindling production, shrinking markets and vanishing opportunities to make a living... it [is] society's duty to see that no competitor ever rose beyond the range of anybody who wanted to compete with him" (Rand 125). This rationale exemplifies the kind of strawman argument that Rand so often puts in the mouths of her fictional opponents: it misrepresents the logic behind real-life equivalents of the laws in *Atlas Shrugged*. In Ellis' words: "this is the kind of belief that the objectivists *would like* their opponents to have but that actually none of them seems to have" (Ellis 142). Few if any liberal policy-makers or

voters would agree with the statement that *no* competitor should be allowed to outstrip *any* other citizen who suddenly decided that they wanted to toss their hat in the ring. By misrepresenting liberal motivations in this way, making them seem both unreasonable and morally objectionable, Rand creates a more vulnerable target for her attack.

Later, the U.S. government takes a turn toward authoritarianism as it desperately attempts to retain power over the country, which is disintegrating under its grasp. In this political climate, a new piece of legislation is passed: Directive Number 10-289. Along with freezing wages and making quitting from one's job a criminal offense, Directive Number 10-289 declares that "no new devices, inventions, products, or goods... shall be produced, invented, manufactured, or sold" (Rand 500). Dr. Ferris defends the rationale behind this restriction: "Nobody invents anything, he merely reflects what's floating in the social atmosphere. A genius is an intellectual scavenger and a greedy hoarder of the ideas which rightfully belong to society, from which he stole them... If we do away with genius, we'll have a fairer distribution of ideas" (Rand 501). Though some of Rand's opponents may consider it important to examine differences of opportunity and their effects on success, few if any would support the idea of "[doing] away with genius" (Rand 501).

One of the secondary effects of Rand's strawman tactic is a reordering of the pathos that would normally be applied in a situation in which ordinary people and powerful tycoons were at odds. Adam Weiner notes, of the novel's plot: "instead of oppressed workers striking against capitalist goons who have bought and bullied the government into criminal complicity, it is the capitalists who go on strike in *Atlas Shrugged*." (Weiner 207-208) In a reversal of usual pathos, *Atlas Shrugged* victimizes the capitalists and vilifies ordinary workers. Rand's heroes are people,

like Francisco D'Anconia, who have inherited massive legacies; people, like Dagny Taggart, gifted with limitless talent and ability. The plot works to show that these enormously privileged people are the victims of the system, which coopts their work and earnings. Meanwhile, the masses of normal people are made out to be looters; repulsive beings who are at once helpless and predatory, and whose main goal is to drain the makers of as much blood as possible. Weiner comments on the rationale behind Rand's reordering of pathos: "It is said that killers tend to dehumanize their victims in order to be psychologically capable of their crimes... [In *Atlas Shrugged*] the murderer is made out to be victim, the actual victim being callously ignored, and over it all hangs a dollar sign..." (Weiner 209).

Rand also deploys strawman tactics in her representations of modern philosophers. Instead of using *Atlas Shrugged* as a platform to argue directly against fictional versions of her real-life philosophical opponents, Rand caricatures her villains. By misrepresenting their views, she discredits them, making them ridiculous and impossible to agree with. As Dr. Pritchett, a philosophy professor, declares at a society party: "It remained for our century to redefine the purpose of philosophy. The purpose of philosophy is not to help men find the meaning of life, but to prove to them that there isn't any" (Rand 127). While many thinkers have questioned the idea of an inherent meaning to life, Rand's supposition that these thinkers believe that philosophy itself should operate toward the political end of *proving* that there is no meaning seems to miss the point. Perhaps Rand's misunderstanding results from an assumption that all thinkers operate the way that she does, manipulating logic toward a fixed political end instead of openly questioning and conjecturing.

In both *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand characterizes enemy schools of thought as unabashedly “anti-logic,” (Rand 319) anti-meaning, and anti-life. In the later stages of *Atlas Shrugged*, she criticizes an unnamed college for teaching Kip Chalmers, one of the architects of the apocalypse, that “the purpose of ideas is to fool those who are stupid enough to think” (Rand 541). Again, Rand seems to misunderstand the aim of those who question the infallibility of human logic: she decides that they seek to destroy logic itself, and to prevent others from having ideas. The characters and institutions that are connected with these kinds of anti-logic sentiments naturally side with the looters, cognitively linking their anti-logic convictions with liberal thought.

Rand’s strawman tactics also evoke an illusion of intertextuality: the presence of different political and philosophical perspectives in her novels creates the impression that these works are a part of a larger, real-life intellectual conversation. *Atlas Shrugged* appears to be in conversation with exterior ideas, and Rand’s readers could easily mistake her representations of the philosophers and politicians of her day for the real thing. However, Rand’s representation of these exterior ideas distorts them so dramatically as to make the resulting conversation stilted and meaningless. As discussed in Chapter 1, many of Rand’s readers *did* mistake her representation of liberal thought for an accurate reflection, and thus felt justified in branding all liberals as anti-logic and anti-life. The dangerous brilliance of the strawman technique lies in the fact that it appears to engage opposing ideas, and defeat them, while in reality it only engages with corrupted or inaccurate versions of these ideas.

In addition to misrepresenting the rationale behind her opponents' philosophical and political views, Rand attributes unbelievable personal motivations to her villains. For example, we learn of the man who ran the Twentieth Century Motor Company into the ground that: "he didn't want to make money, only to get it" (Rand 271). In this and many similar moments, Rand implies that failure is generally caused by a lack of earnest desire to work. We see the same attitude in Orren Boyle, who uses advertising stunts and anti-competitive legislation to drive Associated Steel ahead, rather than focusing on honest efforts such as innovation and management. A similar line of reasoning runs through Dr. Stadler's tirade against the second-raters, who despise others and seek to destroy them because they resent their achievements (Rand 335). The characterization recalls Rand's personality of Ellsworth Toohey in *The Fountainhead*, though Rand's use of the strawman technique is more prominent in *Atlas Shrugged*.

This representation of second-rater psychology makes Rand's looters very difficult to sympathize with, and easy to dismiss. Toward the end of the novel, Henry Rearden comes to the liberating realization that his family "doesn't want to live" (Rand 895). This epiphany allows Rearden to cast off his family, who have preyed on his wealth and suffocated him with demands for his affections. The Reardens beg him for his forgiveness; they acknowledge that they will be helpless without him in the new post-apocalyptic world. But Rearden's new understanding of his family's psychology has made them subhuman in his eyes. He refuses to forgive them, and abandons them to their fate. Other characters take a similar stance toward the second-raters and looters; for example, Francisco refers to James Taggart as an "object" (Rand 97).

Rand's views and her heroes' are identical to the narrator's, so it should come as no surprise that even the narrator of *Atlas Shrugged* condemns second-raters as worthless and even undeserving of life. In the crucial stages of society's collapse, a Taggart Transcontinental train explodes in a tunnel (due to the lack of remaining, competent workers), and all of the train's passengers perish horribly in the blaze. In the paragraphs leading up to the crash, the narrator takes the reader through the compartments on the train, and describes the crimes of the different characters within:

The man in Bedroom A, Car No. 1, was a professor of sociology who taught that individual ability is of no consequence... The woman in Roomette 10, Car No. 3, was an elderly school teacher who had spent her life turning class after class of helpless children into miserable cowards, by teaching them that the will of the majority is the only standard of good and evil... The woman in Bedroom D, Car No. 10, was a mother who had put her two children to sleep in the berth above her, carefully tucking them in... a mother whose husband held a government job enforcing directives, which she defended by saying, "I don't care, it's only the rich that they hurt. After all, I must think of my children" (Rand 561).

Rand unapologetically condemns these passengers to their fiery fate, which she clearly believes they deserve. James Taggart comes to a gruesome end as well, although one markedly different from that of the Comet passengers: upon the sudden recognition of his own evils, Taggart suffers a kind of mental death that leaves him an empty husk, "unaware of his action or surroundings" (Rand 1053). The novel exacts vindictive revenge upon its villains, who are implied to be undeserving of life because of what Rand might call their travesties against the human spirit.

In Chapter One, I discussed *The Fountainhead's* attitude toward its villains -- its dismissal of second-handers as aesthetically repulsive subhumans -- and the way in which Objectivists adopted this manner of thought. Albert Ellis notes that "the objectivists pejoratively speak of most humans as 'tramps, morons, and neurotics'" (Ellis 152). Rand's characterizations

give her readers validation in thinking of others, and particularly those who disagree with them, as inferior beings. In *Atlas Shrugged*, however, Rand takes this mode of thought to a new height, delighting in the destruction of characters (including, as per the Comet passage, mothers and elderly schoolteachers) whom she has deemed unfit for life.

Fairy tales have been teaching children that bad people deserve to be punished. Rand takes this logical schema and applies it vigorously to the world of *Atlas Shrugged*. However, in Rand's world, bad people are those whose opinions or beliefs threaten Objectivist ones. Rand's nontraditional application of moral value judgment, coupled with her insistence on punishing evildoers, achieves possibly the most pernicious psychological effect of *Atlas Shrugged*: a justification not only for the dismissal of one's ideological opposition -- but also for maltreatment of and violence against this opposition.

In *Writers at War*, Peter Buitenhuis discusses the tactics of England's propaganda writers during World War I. He references a scene of Kipling's, in which "a French woman at Rheims, where the cathedral had been destroyed, says to [the protagonist]: 'This is not war. It is against wild beasts that we fight. There is no arrangement possible with wild beasts'" (Buitenhuis 286). Kipling strategically uses the voice of this sympathetic character in order to build a sense of animosity toward the Germans. Buitenhuis argues that Kipling dehumanizes the German soldiers in order to "indulge in a fantasy of violence in which the French soldier became the sentimental and outraged hero and the German the inhuman object of his revenge" (Buitenhuis 286). Violent revenge tactics that would have seemed unthinkable against a human being could become permissible when used against a monster.

Propaganda like Kipling's effectively inculcated the Allied populace with this depiction of German monstrosity, and righteous Allied warfare:

Allied propaganda soon had everyone outside the Central Powers believing in the murderous, raping, enslaving Hun beast -- a beast which must forever be destroyed. The distinction between the German military caste and the German people was soon lost, so that, as Ford put it, the whole nation was indicted. Any hope for a negotiated peace was soon abandoned as those who made any gestures towards negotiation were abused, vilified, and discredited (Buitenhuis 290).

Rand's practice of misrepresenting her opponents in order to justify dismissal of and violence toward them disturbingly resembles similar tactics used by propaganda writers like Kipling. This resemblance, and the psychological manipulation that it implies, must call into question the angle from which Rand's works should be approached.

The strawman technique creates the illusion that Rand's narrative destroys philosophical opposition and proves the rationality of Objectivism -- when, in reality, she spends most of the novel arguing against schools of thought that do not actually exist (at least, not in the specific forms in which she represents them). Ellis asserts that Objectivists' strawmen are one result of a more general logical flaw in the philosophy: "Its main consistency springs from its *rationalism* rather than its *rationality*. It constantly sets up unprovable axioms or arbitrary hypotheses... and then, for the most part, it logically deduces from these rather meaningless, and sometimes downright irrational, premises" (Ellis 154). Rand and her fellow Objectivists achieve the appearance of rationality by logically extrapolating based on, as Ellis puts it, arbitrary hypotheses. Rand's philosophy fixates upon reason as the ultimate human value; her pet phrase, still echoed by her followers, was "check your premises." Upon close inspection, however, Rand's novels are riddled with false premises and logical fallacies.

Violence as a Plot Device

From the beginning of *Atlas Shrugged*, the narrative takes a tolerant stance toward violence -- though only when it is used by the capitalists toward the looters. Violence colors the story of Nathaniel Taggart, the creator of Taggart Transcontinental, whom various characters and the narrative itself practically deify. The narrator tells us: "It was said that in the wilderness of the Middle West, he murdered a state legislator who attempted to revoke a charter granted to him, to revoke it when his rail was laid halfway across the state... He had no trouble with legislators from then on" (Rand 62-63). This anecdote introduces us to the idea of morally permissible violence, and foreshadows later acts of violence in the name of the capitalists' cause. Weiner comments on this passage: "the notion suggested here, that murder is justifiable when its victims are 'looters' who stand in the capitalist's way, is at the very heart of *Atlas Shrugged*" (Weiner 208). Indeed, the text takes a permissive and even gleeful attitude toward the use of force by its heroes, who operate according to their own standard of morality.

We have seen that *Atlas Shrugged* delights in the enactment of violent justice upon characters who stand in the way of the makers' cause. So far, our discussion has been limited to random accidents such as the Comet explosion. However, there are many instances of consciously and directly mobilized violence in the text. Even the early stages of the novel are scattered with allusions to the shadowy figure of Ragnar Danneskjöld, a pirate who uses physical force to prevent the looters from achieving their ends -- for example, he seizes shipments of emergency food and supplies to ailing countries, and then sells them for profit, which he returns to the hands of the makers. Danneskjöld justifies these acts of piracy to Rearden by explaining

that “when robbery becomes the purpose of the law, and the policeman’s duty becomes, not the protection, but the plunder of property -- then it is an outlaw who has to become a policeman” (535). The text condones violence in this case because it is dispatched by a hero who, at least by his own reckoning, is merely acting as an enforcer of an unconventional value system.

Of course, if every person who disagreed with common law decided to take up arms, society would disintegrate into chaos. But Rand is perhaps too infatuated with her own ideology to recognize that others might feel as strongly about their own. She grants a kind of exceptionalism to the capitalists, regaling them as heroes for acts that would be condemned if performed by the other side.

As all law and order collapses, and the conflict between the looters and the makers escalates, violence becomes the main device for plot resolution. When the looters order a siege upon Rearden Mills, Rearden’s workers beat them away in a fully-fledged gunfight. In the heat of the action, Rearden stops to watch one of his workers at war:

On the roof of the structure above the gate, he saw... the slim silhouette of a man who held a gun in each hand and... kept firing at intervals down into the mob. The confident skill of his movements, his manner of firing, with no time wasted to take aim, but with the kind of casual abruptness that never misses a target, made him look like a hero of Western legend -- and Rearden watched him with detached, impersonal pleasure, as if the battle of the mills were not his any longer, but he could still enjoy the sight of the competence and certainty with which men of that distant age had once combated evil (Rand 916).

The passage not only sanctions violence, but revels in it, romantically casting upon the lone gunfighter the imagery of the cinematized Western hero.

Rand’s romanticization of this gunfighter and his use of physical force is dissonant with the attitude toward compulsion, especially violent compulsion, that Rand’s heroes take throughout the text. The capitalists often speak disdainfully of the villain’s uses of force. For

example, when John Galt is kidnapped by government goons, he derisively points out to his captors: ““If you weren’t holding me here at the point of a gun, under threat of death, you wouldn’t have a chance to speak to me at all. And *that* is as much as your guns can accomplish”” (Rand 1014). The villains’ momentary victory is rendered meaningless by the fact that they had to resort to violence in order to achieve it; moreover, the effectiveness of their use of force is limited by Galt’s spiritual strength: no matter what physical torment they threaten him with, he will not give up his soul. Though the heroes scorn their enemies’ use of violence as a form of compulsion, they revel in violence when it is used toward their own end.

The climax of the novel occurs when Rand’s inner circle of villains kidnaps John Galt and attempts to torture him until he agrees to take over, and thus save, the crashing economy. They assure Galt: ““speeches, logic, arguments or passive obedience won’t save you now”” (Rand 1048). The conflict between the looters and the makers has escalated beyond the grasp of logical problem-solving, and it seems that, in Rand’s view at least, a violent solution is the only solution. Dagny Taggart, Henry Rearden, Francisco D’Anconia, and Ragnar Danneskjöld storm the building as action heroes; Dagny “calmly and impersonally” (Rand 1055) murders a guard who stands in her way; Danneskjöld uses a tree branch to swing himself through a window, which shatters dramatically (Rand 1060). The heroes “smash the lock” (Rand 1061) on Galt’s cell door, and rescue him. Only once the country has collapsed entirely do they return to rebuild it.

In *The Art of Fiction*, Rand references the elements of action, and defends them by defining the difference between melodrama and spiritual drama. According to Rand, “when such a physical action is tied to serious, important values, it is drama” (Rand, *The Art of Fiction* 42).

Even if the physical action in *Atlas Shrugged* is “tied” to values, it seems to water down the novel’s philosophical coherence. As discussed above, John Galt condemns achievement through physical compulsion as meaningless -- yet the heroes only succeed at the climactic moment because they are carrying guns. By Galt’s own logic, the heroes’ use of violence must diminish the spiritual significance of their victory, and a victory that required logic and skill would certainly have been more philosophically impactful. However, all the drama (whether we deem it spiritual drama or melodrama) adds to the excitement of *Atlas Shrugged* and to the glamour of its heroes. As Whittaker Chambers said in his review of *Atlas Shrugged*, the novel ““consistently mistakes raw force for strength, and the rawer the force, the more reverent the posture of the mind before it”” (Weiner 10).

Action movies usually invoke violence in response to some larger-than-life conflict. In contrast, *Atlas Shrugged* invokes violence to deal with everyday questions of ideology which, in reality, are normally fought out in courtrooms rather than on battlefields. The dissonance between the ideas that Rand concerns herself with and the dramatic scale on which she represents them may lie at the heart of the novel’s hypnotizing and mobilizing power. By transforming the conflict between conservative and liberal economic ideology into a bloody battle, Rand also transforms the conservative standpoint from a straightforward political-philosophical opinion line into a *cause*. Rand’s heroes live, love, and fight for capitalism; the ideology colors every aspect of their being, and they are willing to defend it with their lives. Moreover, the heroes withdraw from the world of the liberals to Galt’s Gulch, where they wait out the apocalypse; they refuse to engage with the world at large until they can do so entirely on their own terms.

Atlas Shrugged excites a spiritual fervor around its core issue. It encourages its readers to glamorize their political opinions as a dramatic cause, and to disengage from the world wherever it reflects a difference of opinion. It gives them permission to entrench themselves entirely in, and define their lives entirely by, this single issue.

The Gold Standard: An Alternative Framework

When Francisco D'Anconia finally comes clean to Dagny Taggart about his motivations for destroying D'Anconia Copper, and implores her to join John Galt's forces, he tells her: "Dagny, this is not a battle over material goods. It's a moral crisis, the greatest the world has ever faced and the last... We produced the wealth of the world - but we let our enemies write its moral code" (Rand 572). Like its heroes, *Atlas Shrugged* works to construct a new moral code and demonstrate this code in action. In *The Fountainhead*, Rand's characterization of good and evil characters, along with her subversion of words such as selfishness and selflessness, challenges the typical moral order. *Atlas Shrugged* expands on this theme, directly stating its intent to supplant traditional morality with its own system.

As Dagny's main link to Galt's Gulch, Francisco often serves as the voice of the makers' new code of law. Francisco first alludes to this alternative moral code in his college days. During a summertime visit to Dagny's childhood home, he proclaims that "there's nothing of any importance in life -- except how well you do your work... It's the only measure of human value. All the codes of ethics they'll try to ram down your throat are just so much paper money put out by swindlers to fleece people of their virtues. The code of competence is the only system of

morality that's on a gold standard'" (Rand 98). Rand's heroes view productivity as the "gold standard" of their moral system -- as the objective constant that provides the framework for the rest of the system.

There are many obvious objections to this idea: for one, Rand claims that there is an objective standard by which to measure human productivity, but productivity can be evaluated in many different ways (by output, by income, by satisfaction, by some combination of the above, etc.). Meanwhile, Rand's argument assumes that the subjects of this moral code inhabit a purely meritocratic world, when, in reality, differences in circumstance can dramatically impact individuals' ability to be productive.

Willfully or not, *Atlas Shrugged* ignores these possible objections, and continues to lay out a new moral code of law based on the standard of productivity. By the logic of this system, as Francisco and Rearden agree at a society party, "there's only one form of human depravity -- the man without a purpose'" (Rand 142). Evil by this definition has nothing to do with the desire or willingness to cause harm to others; it is associated instead with unproductiveness. During his radio speech toward the end of the novel, John Galt redefines terms such as "rationality," "honesty," and "justice" using the logic of this system (Rand 936-938). Meanwhile, Francisco insists continuously on the moral significance of money itself: "Those pieces of paper, which should have been gold, are a token of honor -- your claim upon the energy of the men who produce. Your wallet is your statement of hope that somewhere in the world around you there are men who will not default on that moral principle which is the root of money'" (Rand 383).

This romanticization of the concept of currency forms the basis of Rand's rejection of the way in which traditional morality condemns greed. Fabulously wealthy entrepreneurs like

Francisco and Rearden defend their obsession with profit on the grounds that “to trade by means of money is the code of the men of good will” (Rand 383). Not only does *Atlas Shrugged* refuse to acknowledge that financially motivated behavior can be harmful to others -- it actively promotes this kind of behavior as the height of goodness itself. Herein lies a critical selling-point for Rand’s ideology: her framework justifies behavior that most societies have traditionally condemned. Nathaniel Branden describes the thoroughness with which Objectivism rearranges its students’ moral frameworks: “Would you believe that sometimes in therapy clients speak to me with guilt of their desire to be helpful and kind to others? I am not talking about manipulative do-gooders. I am talking about persons genuinely motivated by benevolence and good will, but who wonder whether they are ‘good objectivists’” (Branden, “The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand” 61). Rand’s ideology so effectively replaces more traditional moral frameworks that its students can become encumbered with guilt over the desire to help others.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the example of a teenager reading *The Fountainhead* and finding in it permission to engage in certain types of antisocial behavior. Similarly, a reader of *Atlas Shrugged* might find moral permission to ruthlessly pursue personal gain with no consideration for others. Rand lays out an elaborate set of arguments and evidence in order to justify a pattern of behavior that people condemn as antisocial. We see examples of this kind of justification consistently throughout Rand’s fiction. As Branden argues, Howard Roark’s situation at the beginning of *The Fountainhead*

could be a fairly accurate description of the state of the overwhelming majority of adolescents. There is one big difference: Howard Roark gives no indication of being bothered by any of it. He is serenely happy for himself. For average teenagers, this condition is agony. They read *The Fountainhead* and see this condition, not as a problem to be solved, but as a condition they must learn to be happy about -- as Roark is (Branden, “The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand” 55).

The Fountainhead encourages its readers to revel in isolation and to scorn social contact with those whom they might view as their ideological inferiors. From Roark's self-isolation, to Rearden's dismissal of his family, to Galt's withdrawal from the world at large, Rand's heroes follow a pattern of selfish, antisocial behavior which is justified by her code of morality.

As discussed above, the plot derives some of its power from the way in which it appears to prove Rand's ideology in practice. Henry Rearden's personal struggle serves as one line of evidence for the Objectivist argument. Rearden begins the novel as a financially successful but emotionally troubled character; the main source of his emotional turbulence is his family. The narrator reveals the root of this conflict: "He despised causeless affection, just as he despised unearned wealth. [His family] professed to love him for some unknown reason and they ignored all the things for which he could wish to be loved" (Rand 42-43). Rearden cannot understand his family's insistence that they love him, and that he should love them, because he sees no concrete reason for any affection to exist between them: they have nothing that he values, and they seem to despise everything that he takes interest or pride in.

Rand's moral framework insists that love should be based upon some gold standard of its own: that an individual should be attracted to others whose values reflect their own, and who can offer the individual what these values determine to be important. Dagny Taggart feels comfortable with this concept of love from the beginning of the novel -- it characterizes her feelings for her ancestor, Nathaniel Taggart:

Dagny regretted at times that Nat Taggart was her ancestor. What she felt for him did not belong in the category of unchosen family affections. She did not want her feeling to be the thing one was supposed to owe to an uncle or a grandfather. She was incapable of love for any object not of her own choice and she resented anyone's demand for it. But

had it been possible to choose an ancestor, she would have chosen Nat Taggart, in voluntary homage and with all her gratitude (Rand 63).

Like Rearden, Dagny disdains of the idea of loving another person purely out of obligation.

Dagny, like Rand herself, conceives of love as “the spiritual *payment* given in exchange for the personal, selfish pleasure which one man derives from the virtues of another man’s character” (Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* 31).

While Dagny embraces this definition of love as the basis for her own feelings and decisions, Rearden remains a slave to the more traditional definition. The dissonance between this traditional definition and his own feelings toward his family cause him constant suffering. Rearden finally achieves happiness when he acknowledges Rand’s definition of love, and casts off his parasitic family. Rearden’s journey seems to prove the potential of Rand’s alternative moral framework to guide individuals toward happiness.

Meanwhile, the makers’ strike symbolizes their withdrawal not only from the looters’ physical and economic domains, but also from their dominant moral framework. John Galt elucidates this moral dimension of the makers’ strike during his radio speech at the end of the novel. Galt declares to the general public that the makers’ strike ““consists, not of making demands, but of granting them. We are evil, according to your morality. We have chosen not to harm you any longer”” (Rand 929). Of course, Galt’s assertion that the general moral code condemns brilliant, successful businesspeople simply because of their brilliance and success is another example of a strawman argument. By Galt’s reckoning, however, the looters’ moral code punishes wealthy and productive individuals, even as the looters themselves feed on these individuals for survival.

By removing themselves from the looters' reach, the makers have forced the public to reconsider its view of the universe: if the makers are indeed the root of evil, then why is the looters' world falling apart in their absence? As the world plunges more and more deeply into darkness, the public realizes its mistake. People begin to draw the dollar sign across the crumbling city as a cry for help to Galt: "on the doors of abandoned houses, on the gates of crumbling factories, on the walls of government buildings, there appeared, once in a while, traced in chalk, in paint, in blood, the curving mark which was the sign of the dollar" (Rand 995). Though these pleas for rescue go unanswered, they symbolize the public's recognition of the fundamental error in its established moral code, and its acceptance instead of the code of the makers. Thus, the major plotline of the makers' strike appears to serve as evidence of the triumph of Rand's moral framework over the establishment.

Rand's expository methods in the plot of *Atlas Shrugged* diverge considerably from the normal standards of fiction. Norman Friedman discusses the way in which all novels reflect, in some way, their writer's value judgments: "since the plot sets up and resolves a human problem, and since this problem-solving process necessarily involves right and wrong answers, it follows that we can infer an underlying value system which explains the distinction... Events evaluate motivation: the consequences of an intent are, in the total context, a judgment of that intent" (Friedman 192). In this sense, every work of fiction reflects an underlying framework of values. However, this general reflection does not always take the moralizing tone of Rand's fiction. In fact, most of the early twentieth century's groundbreaking literature consciously avoids direct moralization; though not even the Modernists could avoid reflecting some value system in their

works, their systems tend to be less focused upon generalizations about good and evil, and more focused on understanding the circumstances that create different kinds of behavior.

Rand's writing stands out from the literature of the early twentieth century, then, because her value judgments are so decidedly direct and extreme. Her writing seeks to make definite moral judgments, and to outline a system of rules for ideal behavior; it hardly concerns itself at all with examining the motivations behind human behaviors. This divergence from the general trend of the literature of Rand's time was likely conscious: Rand despised Modernism, and found any form of non-absolutism nonsensical. Rand even based *The Fountainhead's* repugnant writer, Lois Cook, upon Gertrude Stein (Mayhew 217). Rand rebelled against the broad Modernist movement to replace rigid, traditional frameworks with a more comprehensive understanding of human nature. Instead, she sought to replace these frameworks with an equally rigid system of her own device.

Friedman discusses another general rule of fiction: the rule that fiction writers must refer to general human perceptions of certain concepts as givens. In Friedman's words:

since the author is trying to prepare *us*, to develop *our* expectations, he cannot concern himself with establishing probabilities and necessities merely in terms of *his* givens. He must also depend upon his knowledge, and his estimate of our knowledge, of actual life and experience in order to know how to handle these probabilities and necessities. He can show that a certain character is a coward and prepare us for his cowardly behavior at the crisis; but what cowardice is, and how cowards behave, are matters to be determined in terms of the community of experience and values which the writer shares in a society with his readers" (Friedman 194).

Rand's methods differ dramatically from the standard for fiction described here: Rand is entirely focused upon her own givens, and not grounded in common human experience. She seeks to redefine common moral judgments and to reassign terms like selfishness and selflessness; good and evil.

This divergence from the normal operations of the novel call into question the status of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* as works of pure fiction. The novels (*Atlas Shrugged* in particular) are on a mission to substitute mainstream morality with Rand's productivity- and currency-oriented framework. Thus, they can be said to operate differently from novels in general, as they seek to replace general precepts with Rand's, and make scant reference to the common pool of givens for the sake of realism or probability. In this sense, Rand's novels fall more neatly into the category of propaganda than that of fiction. As Walter Lippman comments on the nature of propaganda: "what is propaganda if not the effort to alter the picture to which men respond, to substitute one social pattern for another?" (Lippmann 6). This definition perfectly describes the general mission of *Atlas Shrugged*: to substitute conventional morality with Rand's model.

The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* coincides surprisingly neatly with academic definitions of propaganda. Mark Wollaeger cites Stanley Cunningham's thoughts on the nature of modern propaganda: "modern propaganda is 'characterized by a very close alliance with or incorporation of some central, highly prized epistemic values'" (Wollaeger 11). The values of *Atlas Shrugged* are self-consciously epistemic: they seek to provide readers with a vast framework for thinking. Furthermore propaganda "is further enhanced whenever these epistemic values are embedded within such culturally esteemed practices such as debate, discussion, and scientific research" (Wollaeger 11). Rand's practice of integration, in which all aspects of the novel reflect the core theme, generates exactly this effect. She embeds her argument in the many different kinds of discourse that the novel contains: the argument is played out in political debates, private discussions between characters, newspapers and novels.

The multitude of embodiments for Rand's argument creates, as Cunningham puts it, "a total impression of fair play and reasonableness in persuasive discourse" (Wollaeger 11). Rand's narrative expertly spins this illusion of fair play, which effectively disguises its various manipulations and logical contradictions. This illusion helps Rand's readers to believe that they are reading and agreeing with something reasonable, and that Rand's fiction is a concrete triumph over her philosophical opponents.

CONCLUSION

Ayn Rand's work demonstrates the tendency of reductive paradigms to isolate themselves from larger conversations. In order to engage with her work and her proponents in a productive manner, we must avoid taking a similarly reductive attitude toward her work. The extensive, pernicious effects of Rand's fiction have been outlined in the pages above. The impulse to dismiss or ignore her as a thinker because of these effects is understandable; however, dismissing her will not help us to communicate with her demographic.

At its best, Rand's fiction can imbue its readers with hopefulness and strength, and encourage them to take action toward personal happiness. Nathaniel Branden reminds us that her novels have inspired and empowered countless readers:

I remember reading letters written by soldiers in World War II who reported reading selections of [*The Fountainhead*] to one another and finding in it the will to believe they would survive the horror they were enduring and come back home to create a better life for themselves. I remember reading letters from people who spoke of the courage the book gave them to quit their jobs and enter new careers, when all their friends and relatives opposed them. Or the courage to leave an unhappy marriage... The courage to treat their own lives as important and worth fighting for (Branden, "The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand" 47).

This specific appeal of Rand's work suggests that her popularity may be a symptom of epidemic feelings of disenfranchisement and powerlessness in our society. As we make strides toward freeing ourselves of Rand's legacy, there will be a need for work that explains the roots of these feelings, and connects them to reactionary and defensive responses such as Rand's philosophy.

WORKS CITED

- “About Ayn Rand.” *The Ayn Rand Institute*. <https://www.aynrand.org/about/about-ayn-rand>
- Branden, Barbara. *The Passion of Ayn Rand*. Anchor, 1987.
- Branden, Nathaniel. *Judgment Day*. Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
- Branden, Nathaniel. “The Benefits and Hazards of the Philosophy of Ayn Rand: A Personal Statement.” *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1984). Pg. 39-64.
- Branden, Nathaniel. *Who is Ayn Rand?* Random House, 1964.
- Buitenhuis, Peter. "Writers At War: Propaganda And Fiction In The Great War." *University Of Toronto Quarterly* 45.4 (1976): 277-294. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 22 Feb. 2017.
- Carter, Ben and Zach Craw. “Paul Ryan: 60 Percent Of Americans Are ‘Takers,’ Not ‘Makers.’” *The Huffington Post*. Oct 5, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/05/paul-ryan-60-percent-of-a_n_1943073.html
- Cox, Stephen. “Ayn Rand: Theory vs. Creative Life.” *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, vol. VIII, no. 1, 1986, pg. 19-29.
- Cox, Stephen. “The Literary Achievement of *The Fountainhead*.” *The Atlas Society*. June 30, 2010. <http://atlassociety.org/commentary/commentary-blog/3799-the-literary-achievement-of-the-fountainhead>
- Ellis, Albert. *Is Objectivism a Religion?* Lyle Stuart, 1968.
- Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955.
- Friedman, Norman. *Form and Meaning in Fiction*. University of Georgia, 1975.
- Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. Project Gutenberg, 2004. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6456/pg6456-images.html>.
- Mayhew, Robert. “Humor in *The Fountainhead*.” *Essays on Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead*. Ed. Mayhew, Robert. Lexington, 2007.
- Nichols, Lewis. “Talk with Ayn Rand.” *The New York Times*. Oct. 1957. 272.
- Norton, Ben. “Libertarian superstar Ayn Rand defended Native American genocide: ‘Racism

didn't exist in this country until the liberals brought it up.” *Salon*. 15 Oct. 2015. http://www.salon.com/2015/10/14/libertarian_superstar_ayn_rand_defended_genocide_of_savage_native_americans/.

“Novels & Works of Ayn Rand.” *The Ayn Rand Institute*. <https://www.aynrand.org/novels/the-fountainhead>

“Novels & Works of Ayn Rand.” *The Ayn Rand Institute*. <https://www.aynrand.org/novels/atlas-shrugged>

Powers, Kirsten. “Donald Trump’s ‘kinder, gentler version.’” *USA Today*. April 12, 2016. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/04/11/donald-trump-interview-elections-2016-ayn-rand-vp-pick-politics-column/82899566/>

Rand, Ayn. *The Art of Fiction*. Plume, 2000.

Rand, Ayn. *The Early Ayn Rand*. Ed. Leonard Peikoff. New American Library, 1984.

Rand, Ayn. *For the New Intellectual*. Random House, 1961.

Rand, Ayn. *The Fountainhead*. Signet, 1993.

Rand, Ayn. *The Journals of Ayn Rand*. Ed. Leonard Peikoff. Dutton Penguin, 1997.

Rand, Ayn. *The Romantic Manifesto*. Signet, 1975.

Rand, Ayn. *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Signet, 1964.

Walker, Jeffrey. *The Ayn Rand Cult*. Open Court, 1999.

Weiner, Adam. *How Bad Writing Destroyed the World: Ayn Rand and the Literary Origins of the Financial Crisis*. Bloomsbury, 2016.

Wollaeger, Mark. *Modernism, Information, and Propaganda*. Princeton, 2006.

Younkins, Edward W. “Philosophical and Literary Integration in Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*.” *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*. Vol. 14. No. 2. 2014.