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# "Atlas Shrugged" and third-wave feminism: An unlikely alliance

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*ATLAS SHRUGGED* AND THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM: AN UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

by

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Gardner-Webb University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background for *Atlas Shrugged* and Feminism.....1

*Atlas Shrugged*.....1

    Lack of scholarship, particularly feminist scholarship.....2

    Feminism—first, second, and third waves.....6

Chapter 2: Characterization in *Atlas Shrugged*.....15

    Dagny as masculine career woman.....15

    Dualism.....20

    Dagny and men.....33

    Societal conventions.....43

    Sanction of the victim.....55

Chapter 3: Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, and Third-Wave Feminism.....60

    Rand’s nonfiction.....60

    In defense of Rand’s philosophy.....61

    Second or third-wave feminism.....67

Works Cited.....72

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background for *Atlas Shrugged* and Feminism**

### ***Atlas Shrugged***

*Atlas Shrugged* is the story of what happens when “the men of the mind” go on strike (“Meaning of Money” 88). Dagny, the main character, is vice president of Taggart Transcontinental and acts as the backbone holding the railroad company together in the face of insatiable governmental consumption and grasps for power. Henry (Hank) Rearden is a hard-working industrial genius who supplies Dagny with a miracle metal that buttresses her railroad above the impending national disasters; he also supports Dagny through a personal, burgeoning relationship with her that explodes into an extramarital love affair. Along the way, Eddie Willers, Dagny’s childhood friend and office assistant, buoys Dagny through his unswerving dedication to her and Taggart Transcontinental. Another childhood friend, Francisco d’Anconia, lives the life of a playboy; secretly, he has aligned himself with an underground force trying to save the world from itself. Meanwhile, Hank and Dagny join arms, and lips, and fight against the ever-growing government and the schemes of governmental minions to grab power for government and its associates; Hank and Dagny even continue standing strong as some individual acting as a destroyer convinces other independent industrialists and hard workers to stop producing, give up, and disappear. Little do they know, John Galt, the destroyer, actually has their best interests at heart; by the end of the novel Dagny and Hank will each adopt John’s idea that the only way for the world to be saved is for the producers to leave the looters to strangle themselves with their counterproductive ideas and ideals—Atlas must shrug, allowing the world to collapse and showing society that it cannot truly exist without the same producers it inhibits.

The story of *Atlas Shrugged* is established upon the idea of the primacy of individualism. The mantra *best for society* is exposed as a simple ploy for power; the structure that allows for the most freedom and most success within a society of people, according to *Atlas Shrugged*, must be established upon mutually beneficial relationships that can only be created through individuality and freedom of choice that accompany citizens' rights. Galt's Gulch, the safe haven for the shrugging heroes, does not require any use of force because all residents have freely accepted an oath to "never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine" (*Atlas* 731). Society, in order to be supremely fair and just, must be erected upon individual rights.

This establishment of individual rights, touted as imperative for a truly just society, looks to be fertile ground for the growth of feminist ideas, to gain momentum for a feminist movement: acceptance based upon one's merits; relationships based upon mutual benefit; a female character who defies all odds to overcome and succeed. This focus on individual rights notwithstanding, *Atlas Shrugged* is a book that is not only rebuked by feminist critics but often completely ignored by them.

***Lack of scholarship, particularly feminist scholarship***

The collection *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* was published in 1999. The Preface to the work identifies the thrust of this anthology as examining philosophical writers, "paying attention to the workings of gender within the texts of philosophy" in order to "make visible the complexities of the inscription of gender ideologies" (Tuana ix). The editors of the work, Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, argue "that this discussion of an influential woman thinker of the Western canon takes place in the context of feminism is both appropriate and long overdue" (17). Apart from this

work, scholarship on Ayn Rand and her writing is scarce, particularly criticism from feminist points of view. Wendy McElroy, author of “Looking through a Paradigm Darkly,” writes that “modern feminism tends to dismiss Rand’s work contemptuously” (157). There seem to be multiple reasons for the ignoring of Ayn Rand by feminist literary critics, ranging from Ayn Rand the person to her fictional depictions of love and sex to her ideas of proper relationships between men and women to her own vehement rejections of collectivism. These factors must be examined more closely in establishing the legitimacy of *Atlas Shrugged* as a text with ideas to lend to the sphere of feminism.

Ayn Rand was quite the polarizing figure. Gladstein and Sciabarra write that “a major obstacle to the development of feminist scholarship on Rand has been political. It is not just that Rand has been summarily dismissed as simply conservative or reactionary. It is that she has been condemned as quasi-fascistic and elitist too” (15). Rand never backed away from her beliefs; in fact, she often came across as quite dogmatic. Much of the personal criticism toward Rand is based upon the fact that she demanded extreme loyalty to her ideas by her followers; she did not allow much of the personal individuality and freedom she espouses in her writing. Even her writing comes across as too one-sided to most readers; author of “Psyching out Ayn Rand,” Barbara Gizzuti Harrison, opines that “Ayn Rand is the high priestess of the acute Right” (68). Rand was convinced that she held onto truth and that others fell woefully short of her high standards.

Feminist Susan Brownmiller, author of “Ayn Rand: A Traitor to Her Own Sex,” in response to the sex (rape?) scene between Howard Roark and Dominique Francon in Rand’s work *The Fountainhead*, calls Rand “a traitor to her own sex” (65). Many of the sexual scenes in *Atlas Shrugged* produce similar responses from other readers. Dagny’s

sexual interactions with Francisco, Rearden, and Galt seem to be at least sadomasochistic, if not outright rape. This apparent sexual violence drives critics to view Rand as anti-feminist.

Various contributors throughout the *Feminist Interpretations* collection refer to Rand's personal views of the relationships between men and women. Barbara Branden, one of Ayn Rand's followers, writes of Rand, "She would say to me that a man was defined by his relationship to reality, while a woman was defined by her relationship to man" (31). She goes on, in her essay "Ayn Rand: The Reluctant Feminist," to discuss Rand's view of sex as based upon the biological makeup of man and woman, with man as aggressor, penetrating, and woman as submissive, being penetrated. Branden sums up Rand's view as follows: "Thus, sex, for a man, is conquest. For a woman, it is submission; it is hero worship" (31). These ideas, espoused by Rand, are ideas against which the feminist movement fought for years. It is not hard, after reading the preceding statements, to see how critics, specifically feminist critics, have allowed Rand's works to fade into oblivion as far as their work and analysis and thought are concerned.

When taking into account the foundation of much of Rand's philosophy, individualism, a feminist groundwork begins to become evident in her work. This theme of individualism drives much of her writing, fiction and nonfiction. She even titled a collection of essays *The Virtue of Selfishness*. In the Introduction to said collection, she mentions that she is often asked about her brazen use of the word *selfish*, especially when people take the term *selfish* as a negative word. Rand responds that the understood definition of *selfishness* is wrong and has been passed down with an intentionally inaccurate meaning purposefully to eat away at individualism; "yet the exact meaning

and dictionary definition of the word ‘selfishness’ is: *concern with one’s own interests*” (vii). Rand was convinced that rational self-interest was the only successful principle upon which society could be established; rational self-interest would drive citizens to form freely chosen, mutually beneficial relationships that would be the foundation for a truly free capitalistic society, thus leaving the citizenry free of governmental compulsions that Rand labeled unconstitutional.

This individualism flies in the face of the collective nature of much of feminism, especially the historical waves of feminism that led up to the current wave in which we find ourselves. Nathaniel Branden was one of Rand’s closest and most devoted followers, and eventually her lover. In his 1999 “Was Ayn Rand a Feminist?” he writes,

The left-wing, or “radical,” feminism of the nineties sees reason, logic, and science as a “male conspiracy” to oppress women. . . . All the basic premises of “radical” feminism entail collectivism and statism. . . .

Granted that this type of feminist has never represented more than a small minority. More moderate varieties of feminism do exist, which do not set themselves against man or Western civilization. . . . And unfortunately, it is the more extreme antimale, anticapitalism, anti-Western civilization, anti-reason-logic-and-science version that has achieved dominance in our educational centers and in the media. (226-227)

Branden’s assessment explains why Rand’s ideas would be set decidedly against the collective nature of feminism prevalent in higher education.

This thesis will demonstrate that Ayn Rand deserves a further look by critics and scholars. In particular, Rand’s work contributes valuable ideas to feminist energy and



thinking, especially to the third wave of feminism currently transporting us deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

***Feminism—first, second, and third waves***

The first wave of feminism is commonly defined as beginning in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Conference and ending in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution that granted women the right to vote. Gaining the right to vote seemed to be the culminating factor, after which feminism seemed to lie comparatively dormant for some years.

Historian Karen Offen, in “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” offers more insight into the history of first-wave feminism. She says the focus in America and Great Britain during the first-wave years was bent upon gaining rights equal to those of men, upon being given “entry into male-dominated professions and institutional hierarchies” (123). According to Offen, the remainder of Europe seemed to have a more gynocentric focus at this time:

Europeans focused as much or more on elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than similarity within a framework of male/female complementarity; and, instead of seeking unqualified admission to male-dominated society, they mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions. (124)

The word *feminism*, a very common word today, originated from the French word *feminisme* and “began to be used widely in France in the early 1890s and then principally as a synonym for women’s emancipation” (126). The history of feminism, especially

during some of its earliest movements, can be a bit more complicated than is sometimes represented.

Second-wave feminism does not seem to be quite as clearly delineated as first-wave; in fact, there is some debate as to whether the second wave has truly ended and the third wave has begun. The use of the term *waves* lends itself to much overlapping and continuity; only the luxury of history allows one to look back and see a clearer picture of the sundry waves involved.

Most feminists agree that second-wave feminism originated in 1963 with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The opening of Friedan's text asks the question, "Is this all?" (15) Friedan goes on to explore the problem that has no name in an attempt to name it—she seems to end up believing the problem lies within society, as education began socializing females to believe that fulfilling the idea of "femininity" meant playing the family role—being the supportive, loving wife and the considerate, doting mother. Men were being socialized to be subjects, while women were being socialized to be objects. Men were growing and moving and interacting with the world; women were being taught to passively accept their roles. A "career woman," who, a few decades before the 1960s was thought self-reliant and respected, was now seen as "aggressive" or "neurotic" with a husband she would force to become passive and who would be "indifferent to her sexually" (58). Friedan says of the women in the first wave that they had won rights but were unable to erase society's impact. Friedan's book certainly builds upon the ideas introduced by Simone de Beauvoir in her text *The Second Sex* (1949) that gender is a social construct instead of a predetermined category, and that women should strive for a state of becoming instead of simply being. Friedan sees the socially

prescribed choice facing females, either accept the biological role or become a “desexed witch” (146), as completely unnecessary and unfair. Later in her text, she substantiates the reality of this either-or by discussing the choice faced by girls who must decide between “adjustment, conformity, avoidance of conflict, therapy—or individuality, human identity, education in its truest sense, with all its pains of growth,” while the reality of the girls who chose to take the risk of individuality and growth showed that they “were more ‘masculine’ in the sense of being less passive and conventional; but they were more feminine in inner emotional life, and the ability to gratify it” (175). According to Friedan individuality may cause females to exhibit so-called masculine characteristics in their interactions with society; however, that same individuality allows those females to grow in becoming more authentically female. *The Feminine Mystique* named the problem for females and opened eyes to the social structures that were working to gender young ladies for society’s good.

Friedan’s text and sources have been criticized in the years since she published. Rachel Bowlby, in “‘The Problem with No Name’ Rereading Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*,” writes,

Friedan’s humanist premises and triumphalist rhetoric of emancipation also now seem rather old fashioned. The current emphasis on sexual difference as the starting point for questions, rather than as an ideological confusion masking women’s full humanity, has the effect of relegating a perspective such as Friedan’s to the status of being theoretically unsophisticated as well as historically outdated. (92)

Bowlby indicates that Friedan's work should not be rejected due to advances in thinking; the point is to understand the complicated nature of feminism when studying the text. In "The Mystique of Betty Friedan," Alan Wolfe writes that many of Friedan's sources have been questioned in the years following the publication of her work. He also indicates that Friedan stretched the truth of her own life and experiences in building a convincing case for the problem with no name. Wolfe adds that "*The Feminine Mystique* spoke truthfully enough to inspire many women both at the time and since" (105). Despite its faults, Friedan's text raised awareness and stirred up a new wave of feminism that we now recognize as the second wave.

Offen, in her efforts to define the term *feminism*, discovered two main thrusts of feminism that are important in discussing the first, second, and third waves of feminism and how these waves and ideas relate to Ayn Rand and *Atlas Shrugged*. Offen classifies these two thrusts as relational feminism and individual feminism, but she adds a disclaimer for anyone who might see her dichotomy as "simply another sorry instance of the much-criticized binary logic endemic to Western thought" (137). She writes,

These two modes of argument certainly reflect the self/other dualism characteristic of Western thought, but they continue to be meaningful because they also reflect profound differences of opinion that have long existed within Western discourse about basic structural questions of social organization and, specifically, about the relationship of individuals and family groups to society and the state. Both modes must be accounted for if one is to understand feminism historically. (137)

Offen believes that Anglo-American feminism has been driven by individualism, while the feminism of many European countries has been propelled by the relational aspect. Relational feminism holds as primary a companionable egalitarian male-female family unit; individual feminism holds individuals to be the principle unit.

If these two categories are accepted as driving forces within feminism, *The Feminine Mystique* can be seen as an example of a push away from relational feminism toward individual feminism. Friedan pushes for females to be able to escape that socially induced expectation that the only correct way to be feminine is through relationships with husband and children; females ought to have (and take) the option to grow and interact with the world directly, not vicariously through others. This vicarious living, according to Friedan, leads to emotional stress and deep unhappiness.

Cathryn Bailey, author of “Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism,” believes that second-wave feminism was a continuation of first-wave feminism. She writes that a “tremendous amount of second-wave energy was devoted to uncovering and analyzing the work of ‘pioneer’ feminists” (20). Second wavers seem to be a bit more respectful of the work upon which they build as compared to third wavers.

The second wave began to define the category of *woman* as the shared experiences of females. However, this somewhat monolithic approach led to an overarching voice that spoke for all categories of women—the middle class white voice. Published in 1988, Elizabeth V. Spelman’s book *Inessential Woman* exposed this problem within feminism; she pointed out that a lack of focus upon race and class and other innumerable factors, and a simple acceptance of gender as the main socializing

determinate upon lives, had led feminists to unfairly group all women together in the category of woman and believe that one main subsection of women's voices fairly represented all subsections within said category. Spelman's book deepened the sophistication of the feminist movement and allowed the movement to see the need to offer voice to diverse women, further distinguishing within the category of woman.

Spelman's explosion of the category of woman seemed to feed right into burgeoning third-wave feminism. As opposed to the second wave's continuation of first-wave efforts, third-wave feminism works to distance itself from its former sister and views her as too uptight and monolithic. Rebecca Walker, president of Third Wave, which she calls "an organization devoted to young female activism," says in her 1995 book *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, "It seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories" (qtd. in Bailey 21). Third-wave feminism seems to be the ultimate marriage of postmodernism and feminism with its acute focus upon the individual.

According to many specialists, third wavers cast a certain light upon the second wave in order to differentiate themselves and their movement. Professor Claire Snyder, in "What is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay," writes, "Third-wavers claim to be less rigid and judgmental than their mothers' generation, which they often represent as antimale, antisex, antifemininity, and antifun" (179). Snyder quotes author Naomi Wolf who critiques the second wave as "self-righteous" and holding a position that "sensuality cannot coincide with seriousness" and that having "too much fun poses a

threat to the revolution’” (179). Snyder offers context by pointing out that some of these aspersions cast by third wavers are simply efforts to create a second-wave foil for themselves. Snyder lists three main points that sum up the push of third-wave feminists:

First, in response to the collapse of the category of “women,” the third wave foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism. Second, as a consequence of the rise of postmodernism, third-wavers embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification. Finally, in response to the divisiveness of the sex wars, third-wave feminism emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political. In other words, third-wave feminism rejects grand narratives for a feminism that operates as a hermeneutics of critique within a wide array of discursive locations, and replaces attempts at unity with a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition. (175-176)

Third-wave feminism focuses on individual choice—any choice that is lived out and is an authentic projection of each person—and the freedom to make those choices without judgment. Snyder offers a very succinct summation of third-wave feminism: “There is no one way to be a woman” (185).

Third-wave feminists see feminism as an inherent part of their lives. They see every action—“from holding down my job to painting my toenails to building and using my altar to cooking up big pots of sweet potato curry with my best girlfriends before we watched *The Siege* (with irony)” (qtd. in Snyder 186)—as an embodiment of feminism, as a living out of their personal convictions regarding feminism and what it means to

occupy the category of being feminine, a category much discussed and decried in Friedan's text. In this sense, at least, the third wave seems to be the culmination of the ideas begun in the second wave by Friedan's text.

In terms of sexuality third wavers portray sex as fun and completely open to choice. Third wavers seem to believe this approach to sex differentiates them from their second-wave predecessors; in reality members of the second wave split over issues of sexuality, including pornography, prostitution, and sadomasochism. Really, third wavers are dependent upon the pro-sex side of the second-wave split; they did not discover brand new territory. This freedom of choice appears to some to be a dangerous stance taken by third-wave feminists. Melanie Waters, in the anthology *Third Wave Feminism*, points out, "Third-wave feminism completely embraces nonjudgmentalism and choice, sometimes to the point of blunting its critical edge" (qtd. in Snyder 190). Waters questions the very essence of third-wave feminism—anything goes as each individual creates and defines herself.

Offen quotes Madeleine Pelletier, "who in 1908 opened her tract, *Woman in Combat for her Rights*, with the line, 'The individual is an end in itself, whatever the sex'" (144). Offen goes on to mention two driving forces of individualism:

Freedom from restrictions was the language of classical economic and political liberalism, transposed to serve the emancipation of women in a world of socially constructed restrictions. Freedom to become signified a more philosophical, more transcendental, more internalized project in self-realization; more recently, it has come to connote a project for autonomous behavior that, by ignoring socially constructed norms or



goals, refuses to acknowledge limitation by them. (146)

Other feminists have critiqued third-wave feminism as being almost too individualized and too averse to theorization, but it seems to have sprung from the Anglo-American push toward individualized feminism as described by Offen and the drive for breaking apart generalized terms and categories that seemed to rob individuals, in this case primarily women, of what gave those same individuals their unique characteristics. Snyder's summary of the third wave: "Third-wave feminism continues the efforts of second-wave feminism to create conditions of freedom, equality, justices, and self-actualization for all people by focusing on gender-related issues in particular, even as it offers a different set of tactics for achieving those goals" (192). Although many third wavers see themselves as very different from their foremothers, Snyder and other critics see the continuation between them and the second wave. Snyder even goes so far as to compare third-wave feminism with "other antifoundationalist discourses, such as radical democracy. . . . Both require the constant engagement of participants in the struggle for a better world. There are no predetermined answers and no guarantees of success, just the inspiration for critical engagement with the lived messiness of contemporary life" (193). Freedom to choose—an ideal established by the founders of America, and hopefully finally a reality as third-wave feminism swells with each member choosing her own swimsuit, surfboard, stance, and route.

## **Chapter 2: Characterization in *Atlas Shrugged***

Characterization is essential in *Atlas Shrugged* because the story focuses on ideals and embodies those ideals in its characters. This section on characterization will examine those ideals, how they are embodied, and what they mean. These ideals will also be compared and contrasted with feminist criticism and thought.

The main character of *Atlas Shrugged*, Dagny Taggart, at first glance appears to be a poster girl for the case of second-wave feminism, a career woman who has cast aside her feminine qualities in order to adopt masculine qualities that better enable her to interact successfully with other businesspeople. This idea of *Atlas Shrugged* as a representative of second-wave feminism is supported by the fact that Rand and Friedan were contemporaries and Rand surely knew of Friedan's text as her *Objectivist Newsletter* printed a review of *The Feminine Mystique* in July 1963. The review was very positive, and, according to Joan Kennedy Taylor, author of "Ayn Rand and the Concept of Feminism: A Reclamation," "Since Ayn Rand was an extremely careful editor of everything published in the Newsletter and saw to it that only books worthy of being sold by the book service were reviewed, it seems clear that she herself admired and agreed with Friedan's main points" (237). But, upon deeper examination, the characterization of Dagny, coupled with her interactions with other characters, seems somewhat prescient in that she precludes many of the issues comprising the rising third wave of feminism.

### ***Dagny as masculine career woman***

When Eddie Willers, Dagny's secretary/errand boy, is introduced, his movement is clouded by apprehension and by the huge calendar hung above the streets of New York City marking time, always moving but devoid of true purpose. When Eddie speaks with

James Taggart, Dagny's brother and President of Taggart Transcontinental, the scene lacks movement and instead is built upon dialogue. Dagny's introduction a few pages later, juxtaposed with the introduction of Eddie and James, reveals the sense of purposeful movement that frames Dagny's life and actions throughout the text. To further emphasize this introduction of purposeful movement that pervades Dagny's life, Dagny acts immediately when her train stops; this decisiveness contrasts Dagny with the men standing around discussing the problem when she gets outside the train. Although she is only the Vice-President in Charge of Operation, the engineer reveals Dagny's actual role when he is asked who she is: "*That's* who runs Taggart Transcontinental" (17). Traditionally, Eddie, James, or some other man should be identified by such a remark from a railroad worker; instead, in a simple inversion, Dagny is identified as the driving force behind the railroad.

A simple male/female inversion is further illustrated the first time Dagny and her brother meet in order to discuss railroad business. The interview occurs in Jim's office, an attempt to reassure observers that men are still in control. Dagny lacks concern for appearances; she is there to conduct business then leave, to retreat as quickly as possible from Jim's inactive loquaciousness to her world of hard, exhilarating action. Dagny, not Jim, makes the essential decision, then turns to leave. Jim holds her with the following words: "That's all right for you, because you're lucky. Others can't do it. . . . Other people are human. They're sensitive. They can't devote their whole life to metals and engines. You're lucky—you've never had any feelings. You've never felt anything at all" (23). This comment sets up much of what is to come in examining *Atlas Shrugged*: Jim establishes a binary between feelings and actions, as though the two cannot work

together, and assumes Dagny to completely lack feelings because she deals rationally with the world. Although he does not say it directly, Jim casts Dagny as stereotypically male while he believes she should be true to her female gender by expressing some feelings and sensitivity toward others. Dagny responds sarcastically and departs at the absurdity of her brother's words; she knows the category into which he has cast her is inaccurate but hardly worth the fight to try to change his mind. Because of her impatience toward incompetence and her lack of expressed emotions and sentiments, Dagny is typecast as masculine.

Jim's feelings toward Dagny are echoed by his apathetic lover, Betty Pope. The morning after a dutiful tryst, Betty challenges Jim's authority and questions Dagny all at once: ". . . it's your sister who runs the whole works. . . . I think your sister is awful. I think it's disgusting—a woman acting like a grease-monkey and posing around like a big executive. It's so unfeminine. Who does she think she is, anyway?" (71). Betty cannot comprehend that Dagny may be acting according to her own wishes and values; she must be putting on, trying to be a man in order to interact equally with other men. Betty's attitude, coupled with Jim's treatment of his own sister, represent the cultural attitude at the time of the general public toward career women, as pointed out in Friedan's text: "The highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity" (43). This fulfillment of femininity, as Friedan writes, is determined by family ties, not career. Career women are women trying to be like men instead of accepting their own natures that can only be fulfilled in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.

Furthering this Dagny-as-male picture, Dagny is provided a phallus at the age of nine years old when she first decides that one day she will run her family's railroad:

She stated it to herself when she stood between the rails, looking at the two straight lines of steel that went off into the distance and met in a single point. What she felt was an arrogant pleasure at the way the track cut through the woods: it did not belong in the midst of ancient trees, among green branches that hung down to meet green brush and the lonely spear of wild flowers—but there it was. (50)

It is not hard to catch onto the imagery here. The lines of the shaft come together to a head, with pleasure at the way the head penetrates the forest, the wilderness. The text goes on to describe Dagny's love for the railroad; the railroad becomes the extension of herself whereby she interacts with others, the being into which she pours her energy. A few years later she realizes for the first time that some people object to women running railroads; her response to that thought is stereotypically male: "To hell with that, she thought—and never worried about it again" (51). Dagny confidently asserts herself as she interacts with the world around her, not allowing the socially acceptable feminine traits of submission and servitude to be imposed upon her by others' expectations. The text indicates that the two sentences she most often hears applied to her throughout her childhood concern conceit and selfishness; Dagny feels no guilt from those accusations. *The Feminine Mystique* identifies a choice faced by females between safety and conformity or individuality and growth. Dagny affirmatively chooses the opportunity for growth, the opportunity to directly interact with the world instead of depending upon vicarious interaction offered to her through the lives of others.

The simple inversion of Dagny as male becomes a bit more complicated when Dagny relates to Eddie Willers, years later, a different picture of the rails. She realizes, at sixteen years old, that “she had always felt as if the rails were held in the hand of a man beyond the horizon . . . and one day she would meet him” (220). This is Dagny’s vision of her ideal man. She desires a man strong enough to hold the other end of her precious rails and also dedicated enough to work with her. The openness of the rails represents the trust and openness Dagny believes she can share with such a man. There is also no looking up or looking down; the relationship is one in which both parties hold the rails. Dagny believes her efforts are her attempt to earn the respect of such a man. She trusts that he will also have earned her respect in a similar way as she refers to this mythical man as “a being of equal greatness” (220). Dagny and the male are indistinguishable in this illustration; each is holding an end of the rails.

Author and teacher Thomas Gramstad, in his essay “The Female Hero: A Randian-Feminist Synthesis,” argues toward androgyny, a combining of the best traits of “male” and “female.” This picture of Dagny and her ideal man each holding onto the end of the train tracks looks in this direction. Dagny’s dream is that she and the man will work together, on equal terms; Gramstad calls this “the process of transcending the masculine-feminine duality” (344). Dagny continues to be classified as a male trapped inside a female’s body, but she began, even as a teenager, to make the move away from a narrowly defined, gendered category toward a more encompassing androgyny.

The following passage expounds upon Dagny’s search for companionship. She is not searching for others to dominate, like a stereotypical businessperson; her search is for

an equal, for someone against whom and with whom she can exercise her abilities, mind, and actions:

The adversary she found herself forced to fight was not worth matching or beating: it was not a superior ability which she would have found honor in challenging; it was ineptitude—a gray spread of cotton that seemed soft and shapeless, that could offer no resistance to anything or anybody, yet managed to be a barrier in her way. . . . It was only in the first few years that she felt herself screaming silently, at times, for a glimpse of human ability, a single glimpse of clean, hard, radiant competence. She had fits of tortured longing for a friend or an enemy with a mind better than her own.  
(52)

The character of Dagny becomes increasingly complex as we learn more about her; she does not fit so easily into a typical masculine role as it seemed at first. The standard male position, against which second-wave feminists seemed to be struggling, was the desire of males to subjugate females. Dagny, while certainly embodying some masculine traits, does not desire subjugation; she desires competition, on one level, and teamwork, on another level. These two vying attributes represent Dagny's move toward androgyny, toward bridging the gap between masculinity and femininity. Dagny extends beyond the limiting definitions of second-wave feminism in the way she constructs her life.

### *Dualism*

In "Ayn Rand's Philosophy of Individualism: A Feminist Psychologist's Perspective," Sharon Presley writes that "Rand has been a consistent critic of false polarizations and false dualisms" (269). She quotes Matthew Sciabarra who says that "Rand rejected

nearly every imaginable dichotomy” and lists numerous examples, some of which are mind vs. body, idealism vs. materialism, reason vs. emotion, internalism vs. externalism, love vs. sex, and atomistic individualism vs. organic collectivism (269). *Atlas Shrugged* has already begun to work toward a more fully integrated understanding of maleness and femaleness, and further dualisms become prevalent as more of the text is analyzed.

Dagny’s physical description exposes a simple male/female dichotomy. While she chats with Jim in the first chapter, he thinks of her with these words: “Few people liked her face: the face was too cold, the eyes too intense; nothing could ever lend her the charm of a soft focus” (22). This sentence is the manifestation of a male/female divide with cold, intense eyes representing masculinity while a charming, soft focus represents femininity. However, when Dagny dresses for her formal debut, she is described as looking “like a beauty” (102). Her mother is astonished by her daughter’s feminine charm when dressed up. Other characters throughout the text express similar astonishment toward Dagny when she dresses formally. Dagny disregards these reactions; she does not recognize this male/female divide that rules the thoughts of society around her.

In the second chapter Hank Rearden is introduced as a hard-working man whose industriousness and perseverance culminate in a new metal that is stronger and lighter and longer-lasting than steel. Like Dagny’s, his face is often perceived as unattractive and unfeeling: “Ever since he could remember, he had been told that his face was ugly, because it was unyielding, and cruel, because it was expressionless” (28). Hank is contrasted with his wife Lillian, who is “generally regarded as a beautiful woman” with “a tall, graceful body” and “the lustrous, light brown waves of her hair” that “suggested an austere, imperial beauty” (33). Society regards Lillian as beautiful. However,



according to the philosophy of the book, her inner character is questionable throughout the story. Hank may not be physically attractive, but his inner character is appealing, excepting his extramarital affair. The contrasting descriptions of Hank and Lillian represent an internal/external break.

*Atlas Shrugged* is concerned with more than just external beauty; true beauty is deemed to emanate from one's virtuousness. Personal authenticity plays a crucial role in the story's treatment of its characters. Diana Mertz Brickell, in "Sex and Gender through an Egoist Lens: Masculinity and Femininity in the Philosophy of Ayn Rand," examines the role of authenticity in *Atlas Shrugged*:

Authenticity is the disposition faithfully and openly to present one's inner person to others. As such, it is a species of the virtue of integrity. . . . With respect to gender, authenticity is a natural outgrowth of self-acceptance in the internal experience of masculinity or femininity; if we are honest with ourselves about our sexual nature, then we are likely to be honest about it with others. . . . In practice, authenticity often requires a great deal of independence and courage, for the social pressure to conform to particular norms of gender can be substantial. (329)

*Atlas Shrugged's* valuation of the concept of authenticity is a precursor for that very same idea to be upheld and translated in and through the writings of third-wave feminists. The push by third wavers is less toward fitting any certain category and more toward the active fulfillment of one's true desires, expressing individuality through authentic choices. *Atlas Shrugged* generalizes the concept of authenticity to fit women and men, and to fit them in more ways than simply gender; the concept is specified through

members of both sexes. Dagny and Hank may not be the most physically attractive characters, but their personal authenticity shines through to those who know to look for it.

In contrast to Hank and Dagny, Francisco d'Anconia is described as extremely attractive:

Nobody ever wondered whether Francisco d'Anconia was good-looking or not; it seemed irrelevant; when he entered a room, it was impossible to look at anyone else. His tall, slender figure had an air of distinction, too authentic to be modern, and he moved as if he had a cape floating behind him in the wind. . . . His body seemed designed as an exercise in consistency of style, a style made of gauntness, of tight flesh, long legs and swift movements. His features had the fine precision of sculpture. His hair was black and straight, swept back. The suntan of his skin intensified the startling color of his eyes: they were a pure, clear blue. His face was open, its rapid changes of expression reflecting whatever he felt, as if he had nothing to hide. The blue eyes were still and changeless, never giving a hint of what he thought. (117)

Apparently, according to societal standards, Francisco is very handsome; however, the fact that he is fully integrated adds to his attractiveness. Dagny and Hank are still in the world and of the world; they have not made the leap to full understanding like Francisco. Francisco has already survived the torturous decision of giving up on the world, its ways and its inhabitants. Francisco represents the attractiveness of a supremely melded mind and body; he has forsaken any sense of dualisms. Francisco has reached the pinnacle of authenticity.

Francisco's journey to reach the pinnacle was not easy. Friedan, in her text, mentions the struggles that accompany growth: "Anxiety occurs at the point where some emerging potentiality or possibility faces the individual, some possibility of fulfilling his existence; but this very possibility involves the destroying of present security, which thereupon gives rise to the tendency to deny the new potentiality" (311-312). Francisco's journey through the final hurdle of correcting his mind/body split was torturous; Dagny was there to see it. Friedan's description of the pains of growth definitely applies to Francisco's night of decision, when he resolved to shrug and leave the world to the looters.

Hank is still fully in the world, and his relationship with his family is sabotaged by binaries. He and his wife Lillian differ in more ways than simply physicality; his desires differ from hers, creating miscommunication between the two and, actually, his entire family. Hank, like Dagny, desires relations with people possessing abilities similar, if not greater, to his own. He longs for this combustible compound of competition and companionship. His wife and family completely misunderstand and misappropriate his struggles; Lillian offers this assessment of Hank's actions to his brother Philip: "What would become of his strength if he didn't have weaker people to dominate? What would he do with himself if he didn't keep us around as dependents?" (43) She goes so far as to call the bracelet Hank made for her, from the first of the newly poured metal—his own unique creation—a chain used by Hank to enslave his family; in reality, the bracelet was a manifestation of Hank's passions and abilities. The bracelet is an amalgamation of the material and the spiritual. He pours himself into his work and his accomplishments, much

like Dagny. He expects his accomplishments to be appreciated; the bracelet, to Hank, represents his supreme effort and achievement. He offers his best to his wife; she scoffs.

When Lillian decides to throw a party in honor of her and Hank's wedding anniversary, and Dagny decides to attend, the gambit is set for contrasting dualisms to be fully on display, with the Rearden metal bracelet playing a central role. Quite tongue-in-cheek, Lillian tells Dagny she is "humbly aware that the wife of a great man has to be contented with reflected glory" (137); Dagny does not agree but will not play verbal games with Lillian. In "Who is Dagny Taggart? The Epic Hero/ine in Disguise," professor Karen Michalson says that "Lillian can only conceive of herself (and, by extension, all women) as essentially dependent and reduced to manipulating and whining for attention" (210). Adding to the direct contrast between Dagny and Lillian are their bracelets: Dagny wears a luxurious diamond bracelet while Lillian wears the Rearden metal bracelet Hank created for her. Dagny is on her way out when she hears Lillian explaining the bracelet to friends:

Oh yes, of course it's hideous. But don't you see? It's supposed to be priceless. Of course, I'd exchange it for a common diamond bracelet any time, but somehow nobody will offer me one for it, even though it is so very, very valuable. Why? My dear, it's the first thing ever made of Rearden Metal. (155)

Lillian's caustic remarks push Dagny too far; she tears her diamond bracelet from her own wrist and calls Lillian on her offer. They make the trade, but Hank is not happy about it; he tells Dagny she went too far. The bracelet is reassuring to Dagny because it represents true worth, effort, achievement, and production, and it is fashioned of Hank's

best creation. Michalson writes that “the metal represents her [Dagny’s] own work and achievement as much as it represents Rearden’s” (211). In contrast, for Lillian, “diamonds represent love and wealth merely because ‘everyone says’ they do, not because she has learned to think for herself and define the terms of her own life. It’s social status first, and by extension the diamonds” (211). Lillian’s values are distinctly at odds with those of Hank and Dagny.

Months later Dagny and Hank will go visit a beautiful inn, where over dinner they will discuss the difference between objects creating value versus value imbuing objects. Hank reveals a further conjoining of his body and mind:

I’ve never despised luxury, yet I’ve always despised those who enjoyed it. . . . I’d see people who sat trembling in awe before their own gold dishes and lace tablecloths, as if their dining room were the master and they were just objects serving it, objects created by their diamond shirt studs and necklaces, not the other way around. . . . They sit there, waiting for this place to give them meaning, not the other way around. . . . once in a while, on a winter night, when the stars were out and it was very cold, when I was very tired, because I had worked two shifts, and wanted nothing on earth except to lie down and fall asleep right there, on the mine ledge—I thought that some day I would sit in a place like this, where one drink of wine would cost more than my day’s wages, and I would have earned the price of every minute of it and of every drop and of every flower on the table, and I would sit there for no purpose but my own amusement. (372)

Hank and Dagny realize that they create the value of material items through their efforts and their productive capabilities; the material items are the culminating value they both produce and receive in recompense for their hard work. By contrast, Lillian does not truly appreciate the metal bracelet because she does not understand the genuine value of items. Her own value is determined by material objects. This explains Dagny's willingness to give up her diamond bracelet for the metal bracelet; the metal bracelet is more directly value laden in her eyes because it was created by Hank and his momentous achievement, and the value he had created by inventing his new metal meant much more to her than a scintillating diamond bracelet.

Hank's thinking that night after the party continues to illustrate the gap between his wife and him. His thoughts reflect his initial moves toward becoming a whole person no longer cut in half. As he ruminates over his relationship with Lillian, he realizes that what he saw as earning the admiration of a woman he really wanted had ultimately proved a meaningless victory because the response he received from Lillian "was only a woman's acceptance of casual pleasure" (158). Hank had been attracted to Lillian's split because he thought it mirrored his own struggles between his desires and actions. Likely, Hank thought he would find understanding for his struggles in the person of Lillian for this reason: "He found himself held by the spectacle of a woman who was obviously pursuing him but with obvious reluctance, as if against her own will, as if fighting a desire she resented" (158). His discovery that Lillian's split includes the spiritual and material realms sickens him, because although he has accepted society's divide between mind/body, he inherently understands and embraces, due to the nature of his business, that the spiritual and material realms must be intricately connected. Hank's connection of

the word *woman* here with the phrase *casual pleasure* indicates the divide in Hank's mind between *men* and *women*—his general conception of men is as producers and hard workers; his general perception of women is as creatures enjoying the fruits of men's labors. This break between the ideas of *man* and *woman* in Hank's mind represents the general societal perception at the time as evidenced by Friedan's text: "The only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man" (36). Pursuing a man is what Hank expects of women. Lillian got her man; now she has no other passion. This categorization of men and women also plays into Hank's inability to see Dagny as she really is; for a long time his mind categorizes Dagny as a man because of her passions, drive, and demeanor. It takes a long time for Hank to reconcile his attraction to Dagny with his perception of her. Hank struggles to break through the binary of man/woman.

Some enormous fracture exists within Lillian's value system that befuddles Hank; this fracture has been a determining factor in widening the gap between Hank's heart and mind. Before they were married, Lillian did admire Hank and his accomplishments. However, she sees sex as some spiritless physical act that degrades the participants, and she sees material objects as purely anti-spiritual. She desires something greater—admittance into the spiritual realm—as though that spiritual realm exists entirely separately from the physical realm. That spiritual realm she desires can be sullied by dalliances in the lowly physical realm only when completely necessary.

This material/spiritual split is explained when Hank's mother asks him to give his brother Philip a job. She tells Hank that Philip is unhappy because of his dependence upon Hank. Hank does not believe that Philip can perform a job in his mills; he sees the

act of giving him a job he has not earned and cannot handle an act of fraud. His mother complains, “*Material* help—that’s all you know or understand. Have you thought about his *spiritual* needs and what his position is doing to his self-respect? . . . You’re the most immoral man living—you think of nothing but justice! You don’t feel any love at all” (208). Hank cannot grasp how self-respect, love, and justice are independent of each other, and as he continues to explain to his mother his point of view, she responds to him:

If you loved your brother, you’d give him a job he didn’t deserve, precisely because he didn’t deserve it—*that* would be true love and kindness and brotherhood. Else what’s love for? If a man *deserves* a job, there’s no virtue in giving it to him. Virtue is the giving of the undeserved. (209)

In his mind, Hank cannot divorce love, brotherhood, and kindness from hard work, earnings, and merit. He sees justice and virtue as a compound of these spiritual traits with their material manifestations. If he gives in to his mother and provides Philip with an undeserved job, he believes he would do more damage than good to Philip because he would be widening a gap between Philip’s rewards and accomplishments. Francisco makes a statement to Hank later in the novel that offers a bit more perspective on this spiritual/material split:

Let a man corrupt his values and his view of existence, let him profess . . . that virtue consists, not of pride, but of pity or pain or weakness or sacrifice, that the noblest love is born, not of admiration, but of charity, not in response to *values*, but in response to *flaws*—and he will have cut himself in two. (490)



Doing a job well, whether that be writing a newspaper column, catching fish, caring for children, running a railroad, or destroying the producers of a society earns the respect and love of others and establishes self-love and self-respect. Hank sees a clear interdependence of spiritual virtues with material values.

Hank's relationship with his wife further illustrates this material/spiritual split, as well as a mind/body split, that causes Hank to struggle with his sexual attraction to Dagny. Francisco plays a large part in helping Hank understand the mind/body integration involved in sex and sexual choice:

There is no conflict between the standards of his mind and the desires of his body. . . . Love is our response to our highest values—and can be nothing else. . . . The man who is proudly certain of his own value, will want the highest type of woman he can find, the woman he admires, the strongest, the hardest to conquer—because only the possession of a heroine will give him the sense of an achievement. . . . But the man who is convinced of his own worthlessness will be drawn to a woman he despises . . . (490)

The act of sex, as evidenced by Lillian's relationship with Hank, is a foundational issue in the realm of the mind/body break. Lillian sees the physical aspect of her relationship with Hank as a necessary evil, not as an acting out of her deepest values. Lillian believes that Hank spends his days dirtying his hands in the material realm; Lillian and the people she most respects spend their days thinking about spiritual concepts like love, kindness, and fairness. Hank comprehends that he imbues the spiritual realm with meaning through his hard work and determination, but Lillian fails to see the connection between the two.

In Lillian's mind sex represents a material act that is debasing to the participants. Hank has been influenced by Lillian's mode of thinking and feels shame for his sexual (material) desires. Hank transfers this idea to his relationship with Dagny as he feels embarrassed by his physical desires for her; he imagines his physical desires show disrespect to one of the people he most respects. He begins to comprehend the integration of the two, and Francisco's speech articulates this idea of the interdependency of the physical realm and the spiritual realm, or the intersection of mind and body. Hank's relationship with Dagny expresses his innermost values; just as his work is informed by his thought process, so is his sexual relationship with Dagny. Hank should no longer feel guilt; he should feel pleasure at the beauty of his connection with Dagny.

Another character whose actions are greatly affected by dichotomies is James Taggart. Jim's looting takes on a very cruel form. When he meets Cheryl Brooks at her job at the little dime store, he allows her to ascribe to him achievements that truly belong to Dagny. Her worshipful attitude makes Jim feel good about himself; not only that, a relationship with her allows him to evidence for everyone his extreme spiritualism—he is willing to sacrifice material success in his marriage to offer pittance to an undeserving peasant girl. Jim is willing to break apart virtues and love in the way that Hank is not willing to do for his brother Philip. Jim suffers from multiple splits: mind/body, materialistic/spiritualistic, and monetary/moralistic. When Cheryl questions him about the John Galt Line, he dives into the following diatribe: "Oh, what's that Line, anyway? It's only a material achievement. Is that of any importance? Is there any greatness in anything material? Only a low animal can gape at that bridge—when there are so many higher things in life. But do the higher things ever get recognition? Oh no!" (265) Unlike

Dagny and Hank, Jim is not working to integrate these divisions within himself; he accepts the dualisms and manipulates them to get his way. Cherryl feels unease toward Jim's reaction, but she becomes swept along in what she sees as a hero's love for her. Her eyes will be opened in time.

Contrary to Jim, the Wet Nurse makes strong moves toward full integration; sadly, his progress costs him his life. The Wet Nurse comes to be a government comptroller-spy-inside man in Hank's mill. His head is filled with college thinking, presented by the text as spending time thinking of the spiritual realm but divorcing that spiritual realm from the material realm: his college thinking sounds good to men of the mind but lacks practical value in the real world. Hank feels such contempt for the young man that he gives him the nickname of Wet Nurse, placing the young man even below a mother as a woman who works to nurse the infant of another woman.

After hanging around Hank's mills for a while, the Wet Nurse begins to see the error of his ways. He begins to understand that his bosses in Washington establish rules from the safety of their offices while Hank and others like him produce the wealth that sustains the country. More deeply, he begins to comprehend that physical work and mental ideas work in tandem, that there can be no split between the materialistic and the spiritualistic or between the mind and the body. The Wet Nurse continues to grow until he reaches the point of asking Hank for a job in his mill. Hank cannot give him a job because of governmental regulations, but he still respects the fact that the Wet Nurse has matured to the point that he wants to earn a place in the mills instead of being handed one. When the government plans a worker's rebellion at Hank's mill, the Wet Nurse tries to stop it. The rebels end up shooting him to keep him from reaching help; Hank happens

upon him on his way back into his mill. The Wet Nurse finally understands that a split between body and mind is impossible; the way of the government is not only incomprehensible but also evil. In a poignant scene Hank kisses the young man upon his forehead. Their relationship, here at its end, shows the respect now afforded to the young man by Hank. The Wet Nurse, unlike Hank's family, who are never shown in such tender scenes with Hank, was willing to move toward integration. This effort to grow and learn means more to Hank than family bonds that have grown stale.

Identifying and working through these dualisms should gain *Atlas Shrugged* relevance within the circles of feminism. Various people groups have been suppressed for years through various splits. Eliminating such splits offers equal footing to each group of people. For women and men, eradicating these dualisms moves society closer to an androgynous one, where women and men can integrate the best traits of each gender without some faulty dualism that privileges one side while suppressing the other.

### ***Dagny and men***

Dagny's first sexual relationship, with Francisco, paves the way for each of her future relationships. Francisco represents the incarnation of Dagny's ideals, although she may not have been able to articulate such a concept at the time. What she desires from Francisco is the same as her desire throughout the remainder of the story: competition and companionship.

Their initial sexual encounter hints of the violence that is to accompany Dagny's sexual adventures:

He seized her, she felt her lips in his mouth, felt her arms grasping him in violent answer . . . She felt a moment's rebellion and a hint of fear. . . .

She tried to pull herself away, but she only leaned back against his arms long enough to see his face and his smile, the smile that told her she had given him permission long ago. She thought that she must escape; instead, it was she who pulled his head down to find his mouth again. (107)

The text indicates that neither Dagny nor Francisco feel guilt because of their sexual relationship; both already understand, at least to an extent, the living out of a mind/body integration.

Dagny and Francisco continue their relationship for many years, until the night she observes his fight against his own mind and John Galt, the destroyer. Francisco goes on to become a symbol of decadence; Dagny cannot understand what happened to Francisco and detests him, even though much of her love for him remains and causes her to constantly question her perception of him.

The sex scenes between Dagny and Francisco, then Hank, then John stir up critical controversy among feminist critics. In response to the *Atlas Shrugged* scenes, and another, more extreme, scene in Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*, Susan Brownmiller dubs Rand "a traitor to her own sex" (65), while Judith Wilt says that John and Dagny "share a love scene not easily distinguishable from rape" (59). However, when examined within the context of the story, these sexual scenes are identifiable extensions of the message of *Atlas Shrugged*.

After meeting each other, and as they work together, Dagny and Hank become overwhelmingly attracted to one another, Dagny consciously and Hank subconsciously. In another simple male-female inversion, Dagny is the pursuer through the initial stages of their romance. At his and Lillian's anniversary celebration Dagny goes up to Hank to

talk to him, but he fumbles through her attempts at conversation, utterly uncomfortable with his physical attraction to someone he so thoroughly mentally admires. The chasm between his mind and body is wide; hers is much narrower, allowing her to understand and comprehend the admiration and attraction she feels for Hank.

Dagny and Hank work together to complete the John Galt Line, the branch of the railroad that defies all odds, that requires Dagny to sacrifice her position at Taggart Transcontinental in order to avoid the stifling bureaucracy that would interfere with the life and survival of the railroad. The ride on the first run of the line becomes a lively description, for it is a material achievement that embodies the hearts and souls of both Hank and Dagny. Dagny choreographs the ride and the events surrounding the ride as the press tries to come to grips with this achievement. The description of their trip illustrates the connection of the material and spiritual realms, pointing out the divide between the two that is as false as that split between mind and body. Dagny cannot avert her eyes from the arduous work that necessarily went into completing the John Galt Line—this journey represents every bit of that work. The beats of the motors represent the beating hearts of Dagny and Hank for each other, a spiritual consummation of their relationship upon the culmination of hard work and perseverance and ingenuity. Dagny and Hank pierce the cottony softness of the bureaucracy that provides passive resistance to their goal of completing the line: “He looked away, and she turned again to the sight of the earth tearing open before them” (241). Here are Dagny and Hank, together enjoying the fruits of their collaboration, their penetration of passive bureaucracy complete. This scene looks back to Dagny’s sixteen-year old vision of a man over the horizon holding the other end of her rails. The difference is that Hank is not over the horizon; he is standing beside

her. Hank is not the ultimate fulfillment of Dagny's ideals, but he is strong enough to hold her rails with her.

Their conversation on the train ride (she penetrates him by walking into his motor room, while he supports her with his Rearden metal bridge) leads to the physical consummation of their relationship. Their sexual encounter is also a back and forth: she finally breaks through the barrier he has erected around his physical desires; he makes his first move toward bridging the gap between his mind and body as far as sex is concerned. The morning after reveals the major split with which Hank has been living, and at least one critic, Judith Wilt, in "On *Atlas Shrugged*," sees Hank as "the archetypal female" because he has made the "classic female adjustment" and accepted the split imposed upon him by his family and, by extension, society (60-61). Michalson echoes Wilt's idea:

Rearden has been taught to believe that his sexual desires are low, something to be ashamed of, and he can't reconcile his sexual desire for Dagny with the genuine admiration and respect he has for her. In fact, in another reversal of traditional gender roles, it is Dagny who teaches a confused Rearden about sex. After their first sexual encounter, Rearden vents his confusion and self-loathing in language that, at times, sounds very much like that used for centuries by young women voicing morning-after regrets concerning their loss of honor: 'I've given in to a desire which I despise . . . It's depravity—and I accept it as such . . . now if you wish to slap my face, go ahead' (243)." (212)

The call for a slap goes unanswered; Dagny does not believe Hank deserves it. Instead, Hank's guilty aubade is met with a laugh. Dagny proudly asserts that Hank's physical desires represent his values, and she is proud to share both.

After the successful train ride Hank and Dagny celebrate with Ellis Wyatt. After celebrating he leads them up to their rooms on the second floor. Dagny feels a rhythm "as if the wheels of the John Galt Line were still speeding on" (251), but now, instead of the wheels, the rhythm really is played out by their beating hearts. McElroy argues that the fact the scenes are located within fiction makes all the difference in terms of appropriately interpreting them: ". . . fiction allows the reader to have a godlike panorama of the psychologies of all the acting characters. We can examine their deepest psychological motives and their most subtle desires. This inestimable advantage is not offered by nonfiction" (159). Hank's advances in this first of his and Dagny's sexual encounters seem rough and quite forceful; however, the reader is allowed into Dagny's inner thoughts to hear her own desire for Hank: "Yes, Hank, yes—now . . . Now, like this, without words or questions . . . because we want it . . ." (251). This scene with Hank is a bit more tame than the encounter with John because it also contains a verbal agreement for what is about to transpire: "He stood looking down at her naked body, he leaned over, she heard his voice—it was more a statement of contemptuous triumph than a question: 'You want it?' Her answer was more a gasp than a word, her eyes closed, her mouth open: 'Yes'" (252). Hank views this encounter as a conquest because he ascribes so much strength and power to Dagny—she represents supreme value to him. According to McElroy, Dagny views the experience as



“enraptured surrender.” It is not the breathless, almost passive surrender portrayed by romance novels in which a woman is overwhelmed by a dark mysterious stranger whose kiss bends her backward, both in body and in will. The surrender . . . of Dagny is a violent, joyful answer to the age-old paradox of what occurs when an immovable object meets an irresistible force. (167)

For Dagny, Hank represents her ideals and values although he certainly has more to learn, especially considering the split of his mind and body. Hank and Dagny are the hero and the heroine of the story thus far, and, according to McElroy, “There is a sense in which the ideal woman and the ideal man are each other’s greatest test, as well as their greatest reward” (166). The same can be said of all the interrelationships in the story among and between the heroes and heroines. Nathaniel Branden writes that “strength longs for the challenge of strength” (229), but strength also longs for the support of strength—this proves to be an interesting balance throughout the story, provocatively illustrated in Dagny’s sexual relationships.

John Galt is really Dagny’s ideal partner; she remains true to her ideals as she gives up Hank after discovering John in his valley. After returning to the real world and slogging through the boggy mess, Dagny spots John in her crowd of workers. He follows her into the depths of Taggart Terminal. Similar to the scene between Dagny and Hank, Dagny and John are aware of beating rhythms produced by the heartbeat of the terminal underneath Taggart Transcontinental, mirrored by the beating of their hearts and passions and values. The sex seems even more sadomasochistic than that with Hank. Again, the reader is allowed into Dagny’s psyche to understand the consent given to John:

. . . her body now had the power to translate the energy that had moved all the choices of her life, into immediate sensory perception . . . her pride in herself and that it should be she whom he had chosen as his mirror, that it should be her body which was now giving him the sum of his existence, as his body was giving her the sum of hers. These were the things it contained—but what she knew was only the sensation of the movement of his hand on her breasts . . . she gasped and lay still, knowing that nothing more could be desired, ever. (956-957)

This scene exposes Dagny's consent to the sexual experience with John; it also illustrates mind/body and spiritual/material integration. John's physical actions and desires toward Dagny are so meaningful because of his superlative value; in fact, the value of his being creates the pleasure. The physical act alone, in its materialistic sense, would not satisfy Dagny; John's virtues and values infuse the act with its overwhelming sense of pleasure. This interaction between Dagny and John seems similar to that between Dagny and Hank and Dagny and Francisco. All three men represent that combination of competitiveness with cooperation for which Dagny has searched throughout the text, the only difference being that John is more fully integrated, at the point of sexual engagement, and therefore represents a fuller embodiment of Dagny's ideals.

Dagny's consent with Francisco is also implied through the text. Francisco's smile says that Dagny gave consent long before, and she is the one who pulls his mouth back to hers to continue kissing. Dagny's consent also becomes evident through her description of lying in bed that night after losing her virginity to Francisco:

. . . her last thought was of the times when she had wanted to express, but found no way to do it, an instant's knowledge of a feeling greater than happiness, the feeling of one's own blessing upon the whole of the earth, the feeling of being in love with the fact that one exists and in this kind of world; she thought that the act she had learned was the way one expressed it. (108)

This analyzation of her first sexual experience, with Francisco, reveals that the act was something that she wanted, and that she is very pleased it occurred.

Dagny's consent to the sexual scenes with Hank, John, and Francisco should eliminate any charge of rape. To Hank, Dagny offers verbal consent and implied consent. To John and Francisco, the consent comes from Dagny's inner thoughts and is evident to a reader of the text. None of the men rapes Dagny, nor would it fit with the value system of any of the men to engage in such activity. However, the sex is demonstrably rough, especially in the initial encounter with all three men. The roughness springs from Dagny's ideal, that combination of competition and companionship. The sex represents a coming together of Dagny with each man, but within that coming together is a challenge of strength. All three men see Dagny as very strong and want to prove to be at least as strong. The scenes read like two basketball teams finally reaching the court and letting out their pent up emotions after waiting a week for the game.

It is important to point out that there are scenes of tenderness with each of the men. As Hank falls further into love with Dagny, he begins to bring her gifts and send her flowers. Another time Hank holds her in a very sensitive way:

He held the length of her body pressed to his, as if their bodies were two

currents rising upward together, each to a single point, each carrying the whole of their consciousness to the meeting of their lips. What she felt in that moment contained, as one nameless part of it, the knowledge of the beauty in the posture of his body as he held her . . . (378)

The relationship between Hank and Dagny, although in its initial stages seems to be mostly based upon sex, transforms into an affectionate relationship.

John also exhibits tenderness toward Dagny. When Dagny first crashes into Galt's Gulch, John meets her and carries her very gently to his house. Throughout her time in the valley John never attempts to touch Dagny in any sexual way, although it is evident to both that each of them wants it. He explains his reason to Dagny one night: "It's your acceptance of this place that I want. What good would it do me, to have your physical presence without any meaning? That's the kind of faked reality by which most people cheat themselves of their lives. I'm not capable of it" (780). John would not make this statement to Dagny were he a rapist. This statement also shows that John allows no duality within himself or in his interactions with other people.

At a very low moment for Dagny, Francisco shows up to talk to her and lend her an ear of understanding. Although she does not understand Francisco's seeming double life, Dagny depends on Francisco for support. Francisco tells her to take the evening off, and he leads her out onto the sidewalk to hail a taxi. The text says that Dagny "felt relief, like a swimmer who stops struggling. The spectacle of a man acting with assurance, was a life belt thrown to her at a moment when she had forgotten the hope of its existence. The relief was not in the surrender of responsibility, but in the sight of a man able to

assume it” (512). Dagny does not, cannot, accept support from many men. Francisco is there for her at some of her lowest times to offer her comfort.

Dagny, Hank, John and Francisco represent ideals. *Atlas Shrugged* is not indicating that all people should approach sex this same way, even if it does want all people to strive to live ideal lives. Were the text offering a specific outline for healthy sexual relations, it would be in violation of its own main message, John’s entry code for the valley: “I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine” (731). As long as one person does not live a life of sacrifice for another person, and as long as the actions of one do not violate the rights of another, anything goes. The sex scenes between Dagny and each of the three men are meant to convey a sense of strength and the tricky combination of competition with companionship.

Dagny and John first meet as she tries to intercept Quentin Daniels from his grasp. John beats her to Quentin, but Dagny refuses to accept defeat. She ends up breaking into Galt’s Gulch, the only person to accomplish such a feat. Actually, John tells her, “Well, that’s the second time you beat me: I’ve never been followed, either” (704). The mirage that Dagny saw as she descended, John explains to her, was created by a ray screen, into which everything was factored “except a courage such as yours” (704). (Notice, also, that Dagny again does the pursuing. Also notice that Hank almost gains for himself admittance into the valley—his plane comes close enough to be spotted from the valley—but he does not gain entrance.) John possesses ultimate respect for Dagny and her character; this is evidenced through his words and actions toward Dagny from the moment of her crash landing. Here is the man who was grasping the other end of Dagny’s

rails throughout, but his motivation is not to misuse that object as he interacts with Dagny; he acts toward her with compassion, gentleness, and respect, even though she broke into his secret community. John certainly does not see Dagny as inferior; he admires her strength and courage. The description of the woods through which John carries her, as they head toward the settlement, emphasizes this beautiful compound of masculine and feminine possessed by John and by Dagny, and the beautiful compound produced by their interactions with each other: “On the slopes around them, the tall, dark pyramids of firs stood immovably straight, in masculine simplicity, like sculpture reduced to an essential form, and they clashed with the complex, feminine, overdetailed lace-work of the birch leaves trembling in the sun” (704). The description relies on conventional understandings of masculine and feminine, but throughout the text the meaning of this binary has been complicated so that a reader understands it is the joining together of these two that beautifies this scene.

Again, the text offers a joining together of male and female. *Atlas Shrugged* continues to work toward the androgynous state identified by Gramstad. Apart from physical attributes *Atlas Shrugged* does not see a gendered difference between males and females; the text constantly questions that binary.

### ***Societal conventions***

Feminists struggled, and continue to struggle, against commonly accepted societal structures and thinking. Breaking through, and even altering, such thinking has proven to bring about much of the progress experienced by the feminist movement. *Atlas Shrugged* questions much of what is commonly accepted by society, some of which directly relates to the subordination and degradation of females.

Various characters in the text illustrate the effects of societal conventions. One of the first situations that show utter disdain for societal conventions takes place when Dagny and Francisco are young. Dagny makes a flippant remark to Francisco that she is considering sacrificing her academic brilliance for popularity; Francisco responds with a slap across her face. Michalson writes, “I believe that Dagny is the only important female hero in Western literature who is physically struck for refusing to excel at a nontraditional pursuit” (209). Instead of feeling threatened by Dagny and working for her submission, which would make the slap physical abuse, Michalson claims that Francisco needs her to be excellent and brilliant: “It is supremely important to him that Dagny be the hero she is, and her threat not to be is as much a slap to him as his physical response is to her” (208). *Atlas Shrugged* is not making a case for physical aggression but is illustrating the importance of authenticity, especially in the face of societal pressures to conform.

Hank’s relationship with Dagny shows Hank working to push past socially acceptable thinking toward truly authentic thinking. Hank feels that he must be faithful to his wife, his vows, and his principles in spite of his own desires. Accepting and adhering to this conventional, externally imposed value system creates the abyss between his mind and body. This external system causes Hank to offer his self-condemning speech to Dagny the morning after their train ride and first sexual encounter.

In stages, Hank reaches the realization that his marriage is being dictated by accepted societal norms instead of genuine value. At the wedding of Jim and Cherryl, Hank stands watching jealously as other people freely talk with Dagny, only his thoughts as company:

He lost, for that moment, all the days and dogmas of his past; his concepts, his problems, his pain were wiped out; he knew only—as from a great, clear distance—that man exists for the achievement of his desires, and he wondered why he stood here, he wondered who had the right to demand that he waste a single irreplaceable hour of his life. . . . And then he thought suddenly that in business transactions the courts of law did not recognize a contract wherein no valuable consideration had been given by one party to the other. (398)

Hank is still living his life with a wide gap between his personal and public life. He begins to realize, however, that he would not expect loyalty from another businessman to whom he no longer offered value, nor would he offer his loyalty in the opposite situation. His personal life and marriage should be no different. Both parties should trade value for value in order to maintain a healthy relationship.

In one of his talks with Dagny, Hank receives a clearer understanding of Lillian's unearned hold on him through the contract of their marriage: "If ever the pleasure of one has to be bought by the pain of the other, there better be no trade at all. A trade by which one gains and the other loses is a fraud. You don't do it in business, Hank. Don't do it in your own life" (425). Dagny is explaining to Hank the nature of their relationship, but her explanation relates to Hank's marriage. Lillian and Hank have both relapsed upon the terms of their marriage contract; the contract would best be voided.

Hank maintains his marriage so long due to the split between his body and mind. The contradiction between his mind's idea of duty and his body's shame of attraction causes him to try to continue his marriage while having an affair with Dagny. The



problem with the idea of a divorce is that Lillian refuses to grant a divorce to Hank when the affair does come out; her marriage to Hank is her bargaining chip she cannot lose. Hank finally coerces the divorce as Lillian leaves him no choice.

Hank's situation mirrors the plight of females as delineated in *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan points out how young ladies are directed by societal expectations that their only passionate pursuit can be for a husband and a family. After achieving this dream they realize they are stuck in a frustrating situation. They are imprisoned in these situations by societal expectations that instruct them they are fulfilling their femininity and their duty to their family. Hank maintains his own marriage from a similar sense of duty, but he realizes this duty is meaningless apart from an exchange of value. He comprehends that relationships must have a mutually beneficial transfer between parties in order to be healthy; duty alone cannot produce strong, vibrant relationships. Hank and Friedan's young ladies are living for the sake of another, thus violating the principal upon which John Galt's truly free society is based.

Another relationship affected by societally-constructed ideals is that between Cherryl and Dagny. Cherryl knows Dagny only vicariously through Jim's perspective. At Jim's and Cherryl's wedding, Dagny's response to Cherryl's comments clearly show Dagny playing to accepted social conventions that surround her. Cherryl tells her that she knows how Dagny has hurt and held down Jim all his life, and she finishes with the following stinger: "I'll put you in your place. I'm Mrs. Taggart. I'm the woman in this family now." Dagny replies, "That's quite alright. I'm the man" (396). This exchange is loaded with meaning. Cherryl believes Jim is the decision-maker and the engine that drives Taggart Transcontinental. Jim has convinced Cherryl that Dagny is a spiteful

woman who works against Jim. Cherryl believes that her place, as Jim's wife, will allow her to defend her husband against such a vile sister. Dagny, in her response to Cherryl, plays upon societal conventions to relate the fact that she really runs things in the family; the curt response also lets Cherryl know that Dagny will not bandy inauthentic words. Dagny is confident enough that calling herself a man and accepting everything that comes along with that label does not faze her.

In her work *Inessential Woman*, Elizabeth Spelman discusses the pursuit of authentic self knowledge, which requires a thorough breaking away from societal thinking. In pursuing the topic, she references the famous philosopher Rene Descartes: "Descartes . . . is concerned about how much our understanding of ourselves is due, not to unmediated introspection, but to concepts and categories we inherit from other people, concepts and categories that presuppose the existence of the very things Descartes thinks we have reason to doubt" (144). Although Dagny's response seemingly shows her accepting this societal view of herself—a career woman is masculine—in reality, her tone of response shows that she knows herself to be other than a man walking around in a female's body. In fact, she is so cleanly removed from societal expectations and categories that she does not mind disparaging herself to one of its members, playing right into a preconceived notion.

In fitting Dagny within the role of hero/ine, Karen Michalson points out Dagny's courage in breaking with socially accepted forms of thinking. She says of Dagny: "A properly feminine woman is a woman who is strong enough not to have her essential nature defined by anyone else. Dagny defines the meaning of her own actions. The traditional, socially ascribed meaning of her actions does not define her" (206). Dagny

runs Taggart Transcontinental, directs the building of new railroads on her own, disparages herself to strangers, and enjoys guiltless sex with a married man. Dagny has shrugged from under societal conventions; this shrug is a necessary step toward fulfilling one's potential.

Following her discussion of authentic knowledge of self, Spelman dives into the topic of healthy, authentic interpersonal relationships. Building strong interpersonal relationships is similar to developing knowledge of self in that both require one to break through conventions handed down by society. Spelman taps into the work of another famous philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, who sees many human relationships as plays for power; to really learn about someone requires one to be an apprentice, thus giving up any position of power. Spelman writes, “. . . acquisition of such knowledge (real knowledge) requires a kind of apprenticeship; and making oneself an apprentice to someone is at odds with having political, social, and economic power over them” (178). Cherryl's play toward Dagny is a ploy for power; she wants to defend Jim and establish her own familial position. Her approach to Dagny is driven by her assumption of Dagny and who she is. Spelman goes on to say that Sartre categorizes “imaginative thinking as ‘imperious’ or ‘infantile’ . . . . We can tell that we are imagining and not perceiving others, in Sartre's terms, if we've decided once and for all what those people really are like” (181). Before Cherryl tore across the room, she was certain that she knew Dagny. She believes her idea of Dagny has been substantiated after her brief exchange with Dagny. In approaching Dagny, Cherryl makes no attempt to become an apprentice; in her mind, Jim is fixed as hero and Dagny is fixed as villain. However, Cherryl will seek out the truth as she begins

to see cracks within these categories that were really constructed for her by her surrounding society.

Spelman's points concerning self-knowledge and knowledge of others exhibit specific techniques for breaking through societal expectations. It is important in building authentic relationships to be able to identify and explode externally-imposed categories and to get to know oneself genuinely, and to get to know others in a way that is not a play for power. Breaking through these societal conventions is so important because societal expectations played a large role in the subjugation of females for many years. In her text, Spelman is pushing for each person to be seen as an individual so that one general voice will not be allowed to speak for an entire gender made up of individuals. *Atlas Shrugged* makes a similar push for individuality and carries similar themes of personal authenticity and genuine interpersonal relationships.

Another character who struggles with socially prescribed thinking is Lillian. At Jim's and Cherryl's wedding Lillian attacks Dagny with conventional language and ideas; in fact, her attacks are built upon the idea of power that Spelman condemns with support by Sartre:

Well, consider your sister-in-law, Miss Taggart. What chance did she have to rise in the world? None—by your exacting standards. She could not have made a successful career in business. She does not possess your unusual mind. Besides, men would have made it impossible for her. They would have found her too attractive. So she took advantage of the fact that men have standards which, unfortunately, are not as high as yours. She resorted to talents which, I'm sure, you despise. You have never cared to

compete with us lesser women in the sole field of our ambition—in the achievement of power over men. (401)

Lillian's speech to Dagny is fraught with assumptions. Dagny cannot be considered attractive because she is a successful businessperson. A woman cannot rise without using wily tricks to gain power over men. There is no way Cheryl is as smart as Dagny; she used to work at a dime store. Cheryl becomes Jim's wife through certain "despicable" talents. Lillian has not tried to break through conventional thinking to truly get to know and understand people for herself. Brickell points out that "the true irony of the contrast between Lillian and Dagny is that while Dagny is widely regarded by the society of *Atlas Shrugged* to be wholly unfeminine, Lillian is that society's perfect image of femininity" (330). Lillian has bought into these definitions of femininity that are based solely on societal conventions instead of authentic expressions of individualistic gender. These definitions stem from a lack of true self-knowledge and genuine attempts for knowledge of others.

The most astounding sentence in Lillian's diatribe is her declaration that women's only ambition can be gaining power over men. Lillian seems to have accepted a societal structure that places men on top with women in a subservient role below the men. Lillian echoes first-wave feminism in that she believes the point is to gain admission into a society run by men instead of mounting "a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions" (Offen 124). The only available option to a woman who has accepted such a setup would be to accept the structure or try to find some way to gain power for herself. Dagny does not accept this societal construct; Cheryl does not accept it either, although she is going to bear the brunt of such thinking within her marriage.

Lillian's harangue to Hank after she finds out that Dagny is his mistress echoes many of the same assumptions: "Miss Dagny Taggart. The superwoman whom common, average wives were not supposed to suspect. The woman who cared for nothing but business and dealt with men as a man. The woman of great genius who admired you platonically, just for your genius, your mills, and your Metal!" (530) Lillian believes Dagny asexual because she sees her as confused—a woman pretending to be a man.

Cherryl's search for authenticity leads her to an understanding of the fraudulence of Jim's actions versus the sincerity of Dagny's actions; Cherryl refuses to simply accept societal categories. She acts in accordance with Spelman's points concerning knowledge of self and others. Her approach to Dagny a second time reads strikingly different than her wedding approach:

Would you permit me to speak to you Miss Taggart? . . . I came to pay a debt. I want to apologize for the things I said to you at my wedding.

There's no reason why you should forgive me, but it's my place to tell you that I know I was insulting everything I admire and defending everything I despise. I know that admitting it now, doesn't make up for it, and even coming here is only another presumption, there's no reason why you should want to hear it, so I can't even cancel the debt, I can only ask for a favor—that you let me say the things I want to say to you. (887)

Her approach allows Dagny to realize that Cherryl has seen through conventional thinking, and Dagny feels free to respond sincerely this time. Dagny extends her support and even refers to Cherryl as her sister. Cherryl's response is exclamatory when Dagny calls Cherryl her sister—"No! Not through Jim!"—but Dagny's response exhibits a

further lack of dependency upon conventional wisdom: “No, through our own choice” (888). Dagny and Cherryl both refuse to accept familial bonds here that serve to be more hindrances than helps, connections that lack value but feel binding due to societal standards. Cherryl has come with a questing spirit willing to be apprentice, and Dagny is more than happy to answer her questions and support her in the findings; the breaking apart of accepted wisdom, as Dagny too well knows, can be quite hard for a person to face. Both characters deal with each other as apprentices, not as power-hungry mongrels.

Cherryl’s return home proves to be more than she can handle:

Cherryl realizes what many feminists would later realize about the institution of traditional marriage, that marriage is a way to control and break a strong woman’s spirit, to ensure that she never rises beyond the domestic sphere to become a hero in the (male) world of action.

(Michalson 217)

This inauthentic trap of marriage is not something Cherryl is willing to endure: “Cherryl chooses death rather than life in a world in which her innate greatness will be used to oppress her, reminiscent of a hero falling on his sword to avoid dishonor” (Michalson 217). Cherryl found her own way to shrug. Her preference is death rather than remaining mired in a fraudulent marriage, a world run by looters, and a society comprised of superimposed categories.

Dagny continues her own voyage through the morass of societal thinking as the story unfolds. After her valley break-in John informs Dagny that she will be held in the valley for the length of the typical stay, thirty days, and Dagny accepts his pronouncement as her consequence for breaking into the gulch. However, she will not

allow the money recovered in her name through acts of piracy to pay John for her room and board. She demands that she be allowed to earn her own room and board through a contract with John. Here we go again—a woman is reduced to doing domestic work while the men do the real work. Dagny does not see her labor in this fashion:

That special pleasure she had felt in watching him eat the food she had prepared—she thought, lying still, her eyes closed, her mind moving, like time, through some realm of veiled slowness—it had been the pleasure that she had provided him with a sensual enjoyment, that one form of his body’s satisfaction had come from her. . . . There is reason, she thought, why a woman would wish to cook for a man . . . oh, not as a duty, not as a chronic career, only as a rare and special rite in symbol of . . . but what have they made of it, the preachers of woman’s duty? . . . The castrated performance of a sickening drudgery was held to be a woman’s proper virtue—while that which gave it meaning and sanction was held as a shameful sin. (775)

According to Michalson, Dagny’s contract with John is anticipatory in that years later feminists will demand that domestic workers deserve to be paid for household duties. Dagny perceives the societal thinking that has turned domestic responsibilities into a woman’s duty; she also sees the mind/body split that informs that thinking and legitimizes it as a controlling thought. Admittedly, the temporary nature of her arrangement probably allows her to idealize these duties to an extreme, but the point is made. Value offered in exchange for value offers feelings of fulfillment, not drudgery.



Inside the valley Dagny is introduced to various women who have made sundry life choices. On her first car ride through the valley with John, Dagny meets a young lady lying in the sun fishing. This young lady works as the fish supplier for the grocery market and as an author. Kay Ludlow is an actor “whose beauty of spirit matched her own physical perfection” (784). Kay is also married to Ragnar Danneskjold, the pirate who works as a reverse Robin Hood. Another woman owns the bakery shop and works as a mother to her two boys: “They represent my particular career, Miss Taggart. They’re the profession I’ve chosen to practice. . . . I came here, not merely for the sake of my husband’s profession, but for the sake of my own” (785). Even the family unit allows for individual choice and individual value; this mother stresses the fact that her choice of motherhood belongs fully to her and brings value to her life. This mother’s testimony clearly attests to a focus on individual feminism; the individuals are the basic units that comprise the family, instead of the family as the basic unit from which the individual units derive meaning. This mother is not sacrificing her life. She is producing value for herself and for her two children. No one in the valley is asked to live life for the benefit of another.

Michalson points out that although the valley does contain some females, there are far more males than females. She questions why this might be the case. Her answer, after analyzing Cherryl and her journey, is that “there are fewer female heroes in *Atlas Shrugged*, not because most women are inferior to Dagny, but because most women are in situations like Cherryl’s” (217). The societal message that true femininity can only be expressed through marriage deceives most females; Cherryl is stuck in a horribly inauthentic marriage, but she refuses to accept such a strangling relationship.

Dagny's strength of character becomes overwhelmingly obvious with her decision to leave the valley and continue running her railroad, in spite of all the evidence she has witnessed in the valley. The inhabitants of the valley have emphasized that she must make her own, independent decision with various statements: "It is not your obedience that we seek to win, but your rational conviction" (735), "Don't be tempted to substitute our judgment for your own," and "Don't rely on our knowledge of what's best for your future" (802). In direct contrast to many in the world, the inhabitants of the valley treasure independent thought and judgment; Dagny acceding to their way of thinking, without clearly choosing for herself, would be anathema to Galt's Gulch and all it represents. Uncritically accepting their beliefs and opinions would be conceding to societal conventions; authentic thinking is the goal of the inhabitants in the valley.

### *Sanction of the victim*

The most important concept of which John and Francisco must convince people is that the evil they see around them, the evil that drags them down, is propagated upon them due to their own sanction. This idea, sanction of the victim, is also one of the driving forces behind Friedan's text *The Feminine Mystique* in that females allow their families to be built upon their hard work and sacrifice.

Over the course of months Hank gradually comes to understand Lillian and her motivations. She is a looter who claims her rights while offering no value in return. She holds Hank hostage by conventional standards that create his feelings of guilt. In fact, after Lillian finds out about his affair, she will not grant him a divorce; at that point, she feels free to divulge her true feelings for Hank:

I want you to sit in that office of which you're so proud, in those precious

mills of yours, and play the hero who works eighteen hours a day, the giant of industry who keeps the whole country going, the genius who is above the common herd of whining, lying, chiseling humanity. Then I want you to come home and face the only person who knows you for what you really are, who knows the actual value of your word, of your honor, of your integrity, of your vaunted self-esteem. . . . I want you to look at me and to learn the fate of the man who tried to build a tower to the sky, or the man who wanted to reach the sun on wings made of wax—or you, the man who wanted to hold himself as perfect. (431)

At this point Hank has a brief inclination that her punishment for him possesses some flaw, something that does not logically follow. What he comes to realize is that this punishment, and the strength of Lillian and other looters, rests upon his own sanction: his acceptance of the conventional value system and his acceptance of others' judgments of his actions. The looters grasp onto the guilt created in those who live by principle and use that guilt against the principled people to try to gain an upper hand in the relationship. This can work to reverse power schemes, to bring power to the looter; however, such an approach will not create a mutually beneficial, healthy relationship.

This system is exactly what Friedan's text spoke against. Females allowed themselves to be told by external systems that to be feminine meant staying home and tending the children while husband and father went out to work. The guilt of being a bad mother, or not finding feminine fulfillment, created the system upon the backs of unassuming females; it was really their sanction that supported and upheld the system. The world of *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates the further extensions of that system as it

applies to personal relationships and economic relationships and governmental relationships.

Francisco is one of the primary touchstones for Hank in his journey toward integration. One of Francisco's statements to Hank, in trying to help him understand the concept of sanction of the victim, really seems to echo Friedan's message to females in her text: "What if you're placing your virtue in the service of evil and letting it become a tool for the destruction of everything you love, respect and admire" (453). Giving in to guilt and the expectations of others, against one's own authentic value system, puts one at the mercy of those who produce the expectations and the guilt. This sentence from *Atlas Shrugged* is a great summary of what happened to females for countless years.

*The Feminine Mystique* challenges females to break away from the idea of living life—finding feminine fulfillment—through one's husband and children. Women give their sanction to the stranglehold placed upon their lives when they give in to this damaging premise. *Atlas Shrugged* offers an illustration of this concept through the lives and success of Hank and Dagny by pointing out what holds them in the world.

Multiple times in the story, Hank's and Dagny's productions are referred to as their children. These achievements have received the bulk of their effort, and they have poured their lives into accomplishing these goals. Hank's metal and Dagny's rails, in many ways, define their lives. Contrastingly, John left his greatest accomplishment, his motor, lying on a junk heap in his old factory. He could not allow the motor to define his life, nor could he consider the motor superior to his life. Hank and Dagny, if they are to escape the clutches of the looters, must be willing to sacrifice their children.

This sacrifice is a drastic representation of the move Friedan called for females to make in her work *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan tells females it is vital that family (husband and children) not be valued more highly than their own lives. Friedan does not call for a complete sacrifice of children as *Atlas Shrugged* does; however, each individual life must be primary, and this idea runs throughout *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Feminine Mystique*.

Not until his mills are ransacked does Hank reach the point where he is willing to give up his achievements. He continues to believe it his duty to ward off government intrusion until government destroys his child in trying to get to him. At that point Hank realizes that his sanction is the only weapon the looters have to use against him. After the destruction of his mills, Hank is finally ready to hear the final message from Francisco that will cause him to shrug from beneath the dead weight of the world.

Dagny's three loves—Taggart Transcontinental, her own existence, and John Galt—finally merge into a single unity when she accidentally delivers John into the hands of the government. Not until they reach the point of compelling John's cooperation, with his life as the consequence, does Dagny finally fully admit the principle of sanction of the victim. The moment of acknowledgement is realized as a shooting, but ideally the scene represents the choosing of a supreme value over a lesser value when that lesser value threatens to destroy the higher value: "Calmly and impersonally, she, who would have hesitated to fire at an animal, pulled the trigger and fired straight at the heart of a man who had wanted to exist without the responsibility of consciousness" (1148). After rescuing John from the hands of his captors Dagny is willing to make her break with the world. As they fly back toward the valley,

She felt the whole struggle of her past rising before her and dropping away, leaving her here, on the height of this moment. She smiled—and the words in her mind, appraising and sealing the past, were the words of courage, pride and dedication, which most men had never understood, the words of a businessman’s language: “Price no object.” (1159)

Dagny does not simply shrug, however; she concurrently delivers the world to John, as she promised. He tells her it is time to return to the world shortly after they arrive back in the valley.

The fact that Dagny simultaneously shrugs and hand delivers the world is significant. Dagny proves herself the strongest character. She also proves to be the character that held onto her dreams the longest. She does not have to give up her child for misuse by others. Similarly, feminists have fought so that they do not have to shrug in their own lives. Feminism is no longer defined any one particular way, or by one side of a binary versus another; females struggled and fought so they could define and live their own lives. Feminists want it all, not just bits and pieces, and are still working to accomplish such an aim. They would not settle for one extreme or the other; neither would Dagny.

### Chapter 3: Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, and Third-Wave Feminism

#### *Rand's nonfiction*

*Atlas Shrugged*, although often criticized and sometimes ignored by feminist critics, presents ideas compatible with the feminist movement. Rand's nonfiction offers additional fodder for her critics due to her inflammatory, offensive comments. For example, in her article "About a Woman President," Rand wrote,

I would not want to be president and would not vote for a woman president. A woman cannot reasonably want to be a commander-in-chief. For a woman to seek or desire the presidency is, in fact, so terrible a prospect of spiritual self-immolation that the woman who would seek it is psychologically unworthy of the job. (qtd. in Brown 275)

The basis for this comment springs from the foundational belief Rand held that true femininity consisted of an idea of hero worship by females for males. In a conversation with Nathaniel Branden, Rand stated, "Don't you understand that a truly strong woman *wants* to see man as stronger? Certainly *her* man. . . . For the pleasure of surrendering" (228). And she would say to Barbara Branden "that a man was defined by his relationship to reality, while a woman was defined by her relationship to man" (31). These statements seem to sum up the debate that Ayn Rand is no supporter of feminism.

Any discussion connecting Rand and feminism may be moot since Rand was foundationally against the acknowledgement of the collective movement called feminism. Taylor interviewed philosopher David Kelley, the founder of the Institute for Objectivist Studies, concerning Rand's view of the concept of feminism. In response to Taylor's question as to why Rand saw feminism as an invalid concept, Kelley responded:

Because it brings together and tries to unite under a single label, a single concept, people and ideas that are too different to be classified together. They share only an accidental feature: that the issues they are most concerned with have to do with women. But what their *position* on those issues is, is as far apart as individualism and collectivism, or pro-reason and anti-reason. (233)

If Rand does not even offer her acknowledgement to feminism, feminists may be warranted in avoiding her writing and ideas.

Rand also wrote in vehement defense of individuality and individual rights; in fact, the title of one of her nonfiction works is *The Virtue of Selfishness*. “There are many critics of this selfish philosophy,” according to Sharon Presley. “Among these critics are many feminist writers who espouse what psychologist Carol Gilligan calls a ‘morality of responsibility and caring,’ as opposed to a ‘morality of rights’” (251-252). The debate mirrors the same divide mentioned earlier by Karen Offen between individualistic feminism and relational feminism. Rand firmly believed that individual rights were primary, while “Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, for example, argues that individual rights derive from the community rather than being primary to it” (Presley 254). Rand’s overwhelming belief in individualism stands in direct contrast to the collective nature of much of feminism.

### ***In defense of Rand’s philosophy***

Multiple authors and critics offer a defense for Ayn Rand’s philosophy; these writers contend that, properly understood, Rand’s beliefs can be seen as empowering to females and feminists. Each of Rand’s comments from her nonfiction, listed above, will



be addressed in order. Rand's personal philosophies and her fictional writings are very closely linked due to her belief that every writer passes along a philosophy, either consciously or subconsciously. She argues that writers should consciously convey their philosophy. Therefore, examples from her fiction will be tied into the defense addressing her nonfiction writings.

First, concerning her idea of hero worship, Nathaniel Branden offers insight from his intimate knowledge of Rand. Rand only thought males superior to females in terms of physicality: "In spiritual or intellectual matters the sexes are equal. But man is bigger, stronger, faster—better able to cope with nature" (228). Also, the female looking up to a male does not necessarily equal that male looking down at the female as though she is inferior. Rand illustrates this level of equality through her novels where "her heroes treat the women they love with unreserved respect, admiration, adoration, and 'worship'" (Branden 227). Branden conveys the following conversation between Rand and himself: "I once asked her if she imagined that Galt or Francisco or Rearden . . . ever thought of her [Dagny] as 'inferior.' '*Of course not,*' Ayn answered instantly. 'It would not be proper for a man to think in such terms'" (229). Rand's personal view receives slight redemption as she at least believes that man has no right to look down upon any female or treat any female as an inferior being. However, this explanation of physical superiority does not speak to why a woman should not be president.

Rand believes that a woman must look for a superior man when searching for a partner (Rand does not acknowledge here the possibility of various sexual choices other than typical heterosexuality. If one follows *Atlas Shrugged's* philosophy to its logical end, any sexual choice must be deemed appropriate); a woman who set herself up as

president would have no superior man to find, at least in terms of overall position. This idea of superiority, relating to a female in a top-level position of authority, does not have to do with physicality. Thomas Gramstad offers his explanation for Rand's idea of gender, apart from physicality:

For Rand, gender is metaphysical, not human-made. Rand is an advocate of what I call "Platonic gender." Platonic gender is the idea that there exist universal ideal forms of masculinity and femininity, forms that all men and all women respectively and separately either share by birth or ought to adhere to by choice. Rand suggests that gender must be chosen by the individual, in accordance with the individual's biological sex. (347)

This idea of Platonic gender produces what Gramstad locates as the fundamental contradiction: "In metaphysics, Rand is a gender nonessentialist (gender must be *chosen*), while in metaethics, ethics, and aesthetics, Rand is a gender essentialist (gender *must* be chosen *correctly*)" (351). Gramstad believes that Rand's flaw lies in not recognizing gender as an artificial, social construct as detrimental to true individuality as all other forms of collectivism against which she railed. Understanding this point sheds light upon Rand's idea of man worship and frees one to see the full potentiality of her ideas and writings. Gramstad makes an argument for androgyny, the realization of the best attributes of each category of gender to produce the most fully integrated individual. His final argument is as follows:

The time is ripe for Woman the Hero, the ideal woman—woman as equal and woman as conqueror. [The necessary synthesis would] uphold Randian androgynes—a fully realized heroism that extends to female and

male heroes equally. It is a synthesis that clears Rand's philosophy of androcentric and Platonic gender ideals, while clearing feminism of any vestige of collectivism and victimology. (355)

*Atlas Shrugged* attempts to offer androgynous heroes and for the most part succeeds. Dagny, John, Francisco, and Hank are able to overcome societal expectations of masculine and feminine characteristics. It is during their sexual interactions that they become caught up in having to choose their gender correctly; Dagny must submit and accept while her lover must be the aggressor.

To address Rand's sexual monotony, Gramstad describes four main categories of human sexual interaction: "male domination with active penile penetration; female domination with active vaginal engulfment; switching roles, sometimes one dominates, sometimes the other; equality, with neither partner more active or dominating" (350). Gramstad does point out that these categories are not rigid and often overlap. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand complicates gender, offering androgynous characters, except when it comes to sex. *Atlas Shrugged* offers no sexual variety in its descriptions of lovemaking. However, as mentioned in this thesis in the section analyzing Dagny and men, if *Atlas Shrugged* was prescribing one particular way of having sex, it would be in violation of its foundational principle that no one should live life for the sake of another. In keeping this principle first and foremost one can understand that the sexual scenes in the novel are an ideal, and that, in reality, the practice of sex is left up to each individual participant. Despite her faults concerning gender, Brickell writes:

Her ethics provides a fertile ground on which to develop an account of gender sensitive to the unique qualities and dispositions of individual

men and women, as well as to the sanctity of the life and happiness of those individuals. As such, it is one of the few philosophies capable of liberating men and women from the harmful and destructive gender roles that have existed throughout most of human history. (330)

Rand's philosophy establishes a great starting point for gender to grow toward androgyny, for males and females to reach toward their full potentialities.

Secondly, Kelley's observation of Rand's lack of acknowledgement of the category of feminism sounds similar to Spelman's argument in her *Inessential Woman*. Spelman argues that one monolithic voice cannot speak for all different women. The category of woman is filled with individuals who each construct different experiences and hopes and ideas as they live their separate lives. Rand certainly recognizes a physical category of women, but *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates that she does not believe any of those women must live one particular style of life. In Galt's Gulch Dagny met a fisherwoman, an actress, and a housewife. Their only commonality, other than being female, was the fact that they believed in their freedom to live their own lives, exactly as they pleased. Presley writes of Rand:

Her philosophy . . . could lead to a flowering of the full potential of individual women and to an optimal setting for development and expression of love and caring between free, equal, and autonomous individuals who neither oppress others nor let themselves be oppressed. (271)

Rand differs from many feminist critics in starting point alone: Rand begins with each individual while many feminists begin with the category of female. Both desire the same outcome: freedom, equality, and authenticity.

Thirdly, Sharon Presley defends Rand's strong philosophy of individualism; in doing so she references the work and findings of Alan Waterman, a psychologist and professor at Trenton State College. Waterman's book *The Psychology of Individualism* (1984), points out the commonly ascribed vices of individualism are self-absorption, narcissism, unscrupulous competition, alienation, atomism, privatism, deviance, rationalization, worship of objectivity, relativism, and nihilism (71) (qtd. in Presley 255). Waterman argues that true individualism produces higher levels of tolerance for the ideas of others, stronger relationships that are more mutually beneficial, and higher levels of operational thought and creativity. Waterman makes the point that ethical individualism sharply contrasts with the societal message "of short-run hedonism, of happiness through material consumption, of success without hard work" (qtd. in Presley 260). This latter description comes nowhere close to describing the view of individuality expressed in *Atlas Shrugged*, and this is very important in correctly analyzing the staunch idea of individualism within its pages.

Rand's optimum individualist is an egoist, not an egotist, not someone given license to violate the rights of others; instead of violating the rights of others, Rand's egoist respects those rights because she desires the protection of her own rights. Individuals working together form a stronger sense of community than individuals functioning under an externally imposed category of community. Presley quotes Taylor: "When the group being referred to is a free association of people with a common goal

uniting to achieve that goal, the group acts as an extension of its individual members and is no contradiction to individualism . . . in fact, human nature is such that many life-serving goals can only be reached by people willing to act in concert” (271). Rand pushes for individuals to have just such freedom, the ability to freely choose associations that serve the needs of each individual. Presley writes that “caring, community, and relationships are not contradictions to Rand’s individualism” (271). A correct understanding of ethical individualism, as established here by Presley, is important in comprehending that *Atlas Shrugged* calls for an individualism expressed through respectful relationships that are mutually beneficial to each party involved.

### ***Second or third-wave feminism***

*Atlas Shrugged* is a precursor for Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* printed six years later. Dagny Taggart is the embodiment of Friedan’s ideal female. She does not accept the societal standard that she must limit herself to a domesticated world in order to find fulfillment. Friedan quotes a 1960 *Redbook* article that reported, “Few women would want to thumb their noses at husbands, children and community and go off on their own. Those who do may be talented individuals, but they rarely are successful women” (25). Dagny does just that throughout *Atlas Shrugged*, and her determination leads her to her ideal man, with whom she can continue to work and grow. Dagny is very successful, both in business and love. Dagny is an object, not a subject, and Friedan’s text pointed out this important difference. Dagny acts and moves and grows; she keeps the railroad running in spite of interference from others, mostly men, who, according to society, should be the doers. In another comparison Friedan quotes Freud: “The feminine situation is, however, only established when the wish for the penis is replaced by the wish for a child—the child

taking the place of the penis” (116). Dagny’s rails serve as her phallus when she is nine years old. As she grows older, the railroad becomes her child. This parallel firmly establishes Dagny in the world of the mind, the world of production and doing and creating. Friedan references a 1956 issue of *Life* when she mentions a career woman who is “so ‘masculinized’ by her career that her castrated, impotent, passive husband is indifferent to her sexually” (58). Dagny’s men do not lack attraction to her; in fact, her successes seem to directly increase their desire for her. Although Dagny fulfills Friedan’s call for authentic femininity, a femininity divorced from society’s standard of what it means to be feminine, her character cannot be squeezed into the second wave only. Dagny points toward a coming third wave of feminism that further distinguishes true femininity from societal expectations in its focus on individuality.

In her “New Directions Essay,” Snyder compares third-wave feminism to radical democracy. Ayn Rand unapologetically argues for radical democracy, and she sees capitalism as the economic system most compatible with true democracy and freedom. Rand certainly differs from many feminist critics on this point. Economic disagreements aside, the freedom to choose and to truly engage in a free democracy are key components of the world in *Atlas Shrugged*. This overwhelming desire for freedom and self-actualization are shared characteristics between Rand and third-wave feminists. Snyder identifies three main points in her essay that will guide a comparison between *Atlas Shrugged* and third-wave feminism.

The first point Snyder makes in defining third-wave feminism is breaking apart the category of female in order to allow for “an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism” (175). In Galt’s Galt’s are a fisherwoman, a housewife, an actor,

and Dagny. The men's professions also vary. The foundational characteristic is that each inhabitant has accepted John's oath of living life for oneself. No compulsion exists for its inhabitants other than their agreement with this oath.

When John decides it is time for the producers to reenter the world, there will be no military takeover that leads to tyranny. The only objective will be to limit government from compelling the lives of its citizens. Females, and males, will be free to determine their own actions, lives, and gender as each individual sees fit. This freedom to express femininity as unique individuals will create an entire society that will be both intersectional and multiperspectival.

Snyder's second point concerning third-wave feminism involves "multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification" (175). The story of *Atlas Shrugged* is based upon principles and the living out of those principles. Galt's Gulch holds one principle as necessary, and that principle is the primacy of each individual life. This guiding principle serves as the only synthesis and theoretical justification necessary to life within the valley.

When Dagny is blocked from completing the Rio Norte Line of Taggart Transcontinental by the government and her own company, she resigns her position at Taggart Transcontinental, establishes her own small company, rounds up the necessary funds, and completes the line that she calls the John Galt Line. She has a tough time finding people to offer financial support and who are willing to work with her. Dagny forsakes synthesis and theoretical justification to complete what she knows must be completed. She stands upon her own judgment and acts accordingly.



Throughout *Atlas Shrugged* synthesis is shown to be overrated; theoretical justification takes a back seat to independent judgment. In the new world that John and his fellow producers will establish upon leaving the valley, citizens will be free to live their lives as they see fit, as long as each citizen's actions do not violate the rights of another citizen. This freedom allows for the ultimate expression of multivocality and action. The choice will rest upon each individual inhabitant. True freedom allows for individual decisions.

Snyder's final point argues that "third-wave feminism rejects grand narratives for a feminism that operates as a hermeneutics of critique within a wide array of discursive locations, and replaces attempts at unity with a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition" (176). Decentralization is an ideal of *Atlas Shrugged*, an idea that will be realized when John and company return to the world. The primacy of the individual will create coalitions that spring from individual choices instead of unities that are often superimposed upon individuals. John wants to establish no grand narrative other than freedom. Also, the main thrusts of each of these producer's lives have been improvement, as evidenced by their achievements. They certainly welcome criticism, but they will sift that criticism and make independent decisions. No one will be required to accept any other opinion as her own; each person stands as a unique individual capable of individual growth and prosperity.

Offen identifies two driving forces within individualism, as previously referenced in section one: "Freedom from restrictions. . . . Freedom to become . . ." (146). Galt's Gulch is established in *Atlas Shrugged* for exactly this reason—to give its citizens freedom from the restrictions faced in the outside world along with the freedom to

achieve their greatest potentiality. Like the adherents of third-wave feminism, John, Hank, Francisco, Dagny, and the others who shrugged are attempting to undo the status quo and implement revolutionary ideas that empower each citizen. Snyder comments that “there is no one way to be a woman” (185). *Atlas Shrugged* illustrates that there is no one way to be a citizen or an individual, whether female or male. *Atlas Shrugged* offers a unique portrait of true freedom, the freedom from imposed restrictions and the freedom to become what one desires. This is the ideal of both *Atlas Shrugged* and third-wave feminism, an ideal worth reaching for as our world grows and changes.

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