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# Who *Was* John Galt? The Creation of Ayn Rand's Ultimate Ideal Man

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*Atlas Shrugged* begins with the question: “Who is John Galt?” By the end of the novel, we have had many answers—from the legend of Prometheus, to the story of Starnesville, to the speech in which John Galt himself tells the world who he is and what he has done.

I begin this essay with a different question: “Who *was* John Galt?”—Ayn Rand’s creation, her ultimate ideal man. What were her first plans for the character? On what inspirations did she draw? How did her plans change, as she wrote? What do her notes and manuscripts reveal about her work with this character? What, ultimately, did Ayn Rand achieve, in the creation of this character in this novel? The topic, in other words, is Ayn Rand as the creator of John Galt, or John Galt as the creation of Ayn Rand.

The first step toward the creation of John Galt occurred in 1914, in St. Petersburg. At the age of nine, Alisa Rozenbaum found her first hero in the face, the form, and the courage of Cyrus Paltons, a British captain serving in India. She met him in the pages of *L'Écolier illustré*, a French children’s magazine, in a serialized adventure novel, entitled *La Vallée Mystérieuse* [*The Mysterious Valley*] by Maurice Champagne.<sup>1</sup> She later said that she had been romantically in love with Cyrus, in a “serious, metaphysical” sense. Half a century later, she was still in love with him: “that kind of feeling I have for him, it still exists. . . . There’s nothing I can add in quality to any serious love later on that wasn’t contained in that.” She honored him, in a private allusion, when she wrote her first novel, *We the Living*, giving the heroine the name Kira, the Russian female equivalent of Cyrus. He was the visual image of all her later heroes. The image of Cyrus, she said, “was everything that I wanted.” The illustrations of René Giffey conveyed the perfect depiction “of my present hero. Tall, long-legged, with . . . trousers and leggings, the way soldiers wear, but no jacket, just an open-collared shirt, torn in front, . . . opened very

low, sleeves rolled at the elbows and hair falling down over one eye.” Cyrus helped her, she said, “to concretize: what was it I called my kind of man. That whole expression which I carried thereafter of ‘my kind of man’ began with that story.” At nine, she was able to identify as important his “intelligence, independence, and courage”; she later said: “I don’t know that I would have the word yet in my vocabulary fully or not, but ‘the heroic man.’”<sup>2</sup>

For a fuller picture of the character who inspired her image of her “kind of man,” “the heroic man,” read *La Vallée Mystérieuse* in French or, in Bill Bucko’s translation, *The Mysterious Valley*. You will notice several parallels between Cyrus Paltons and Howard Roark, the *first* ideal man she created: strength, courage, competence, self-confidence, resourcefulness, invincible resolution, and a ruthless sense of justice.<sup>3</sup> The same qualities, of course, are found in John Galt, her *ultimate* ideal man.

An additional parallel pertains to the timing of the introduction of the hero. We hear about Cyrus in the first chapter, but we do not meet him until close to the midpoint of the novel. He is described as the bravest of the brave, yet he is assumed, at the beginning of the story, to be dead and gone—actually, gone and dead, that is carried off by a tiger, and killed. We eventually learn, however, that the leader who disappeared did not die; he is discovered alive and very much kicking, along with his vanished companions, in a mysterious valley. Maurice Champagne, in other words, built the novel on a mystery—and on a surprise, a surprise that was a denial of metaphysical disaster. The hero’s very existence was a kind of triumph, and a nine-year-old girl appreciated it.

When young Alisa read about the disappearance of Cyrus, in the first installment (May 14, 1914), she did not believe he was dead. She observed that he had been “planted as the hero,” strong and invincible, and she wondered if he might have been kidnapped by trained tigers, and therefore, perhaps, still alive. Her governess told her that tigers cannot be trained, and Cyrus must be dead. (In other words: Grow up.) The news of Cyrus’s survival appeared in the issue of September 3. (History does not record what, if anything, the governess had to say about that.) Little Alisa was an insightful reader, immediately in tune with the author’s purpose in planting his hero. The rest of the novel did not disappoint her. From reading *The Mysterious Valley*, she experienced an intense admiration for a hero who was brave, intelligent, defiant, and never less than triumphant in body and spirit. It was a very good start.

The summer she discovered Cyrus was also the summer she decided to become a writer of fiction. From that time until the completion of *Atlas Shrugged*, she thought of herself as a fiction writer. The hero-worship that began with Cyrus Paltons and with

her self-dedication to a career as a writer of fiction was not to be fulfilled in her work until she had created John Galt and told his whole story.

Part of that story, ultimately, involved not only the hero, but also other elements. In a different French children's magazine, at about the same time, she read another story she liked, about two adolescents participating in a submarine expedition in search of a lost city.<sup>4</sup> It was a serialized novel by Georges Gustave-Toudouze, *Le Petit Roi d'Ys* [*The Little King of Ys*]. She liked the novel, she said, because the young girl was "very much, in childish terms, what Dagny would be. She acted as an absolute equal with all the adults in the story, and she was concerned with an adult purpose. And *that* I liked . . . I would say that I liked her only because she took her place, in effect, by the side of the right kind of man."<sup>5</sup> In *The Little King of Ys*, the girl and boy (along with the adults) explore a sunken city, an underwater kingdom. The girl worships the boy as a hero: she crowns him king of this underground realm. What, then, did it mean for a girl who was "what Dagny would be" to take her place "by the side of the right kind of man"? It meant acting with purpose and courage, along with the man and in her own right, and seeing that man acknowledged as what he is, as the head of the city beneath the sea. Remembering this novel, nearly half a century later, Ayn Rand herself mentioned, as elements she valued, both the character and the setting: the precursor of Dagny and the location of Atlantis.

Fast forward to 1923, again in St. Petersburg. Alisa Rozenbaum was eighteen. She projected, in considerable detail, a novel she referred to as "the grandfather of *Atlas Shrugged*," or "a sense of life projection of *Atlas*."<sup>6</sup> No written outline has survived, but she later retold the story, as well as she could remember it. She mentioned the following plot elements, which I will summarize:

1. One by one, the men of ability are disappearing—each after a single glance at the face of the heroine, a woman of great spiritual beauty.
2. One man has himself chained to his desk to resist temptation; he vanishes nonetheless.
3. The heroine organizes the men of ability into a kind of army.
4. This army represents the United States, with Europe as the enemy. There is no Russia at all.
5. The "real hero arises only somewhere in the middle of Part 2."
6. The final man of ability on the heroine's list is a brilliant inventor.

The parallels with *Atlas Shrugged* are obvious, although there are also several important differences. The early novel lacked the premise of the strike of the men of the mind; the men of ability, in this story, vanish from public view because the heroine's spiritual beauty has drawn them away. The inventor, moreover, does not have the narrative function of John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*: although he is a heroic figure, he is not the prime mover. The heroine initiates the action, and the male inventor is the last prize, the last to join. The prime mover in this projected novel was the heroine, who played the role of John Galt (as the organizer and implementer of the plot).

And who was she, that early John Galt? Ayn Rand did not remember the heroine's name. She did, however, remember the name of a secondary character, the heroine's assistant, who ran her business when she was away: he acted in her place, and had always loved her in a "hopeless, non-presumptuous way." His name—was Edwin Willers. When she began *Atlas Shrugged*, she said, she "couldn't resist" using the character and the relationship from her earlier idea for a novel. She changed, of course, much else.

Twenty years later. Nineteen forty-three. New York City. Ayn Rand was thirty-eight. The strike premise—as the basis of a novel, and as a capsule summary—came to her in the year after she completed *The Fountainhead*, in August or September, some time after the publication of the novel but before she signed the movie deal with Warner Brothers. A friend had insisted, in a conversation, that she, Ayn Rand, had an obligation to write nonfiction, to explain her ideas. Ayn Rand asked: What if I went on strike? What if all the men of the mind went on strike?<sup>7</sup> A version of this very question, in fact, had appeared in *The Fountainhead*: "What would happen to the world without those who do, think, work, produce?"<sup>8</sup> In *The Fountainhead*, this is a rhetorical question. In her new novel, it became the principle underlying the plot. She said that the plot-theme came to her first. This idea—the mind on strike—was the beginning of the novel.

Not long after that, she knew who her two main characters had to be. Galt was first. "I can't remember when the character of Galt occurred to me. It *feels* as if it was always there. When I can't remember the origin of anything in my novel, it's usually the case that it's so intrinsic a part of the story that I can't separate the assignment from this particular idea, that the idea had to be *there* before the story started to gel at all. So that Galt was almost simultaneous with the conception of the story of the strike. And Dagny [was] the next one." She also decided, very early, that the climax was to be the torture of Galt.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the characterization of Galt, she named, as inspiration, her husband, Frank O'Connor. She often said that he

was the inspiration for all her heroes. The original dedication page of *The Fountainhead*, which was originally to be called “Second Hand Lives,” read: “To Frank O’Connor [,] who is less guilty of second-handedness than anyone I have ever met.”<sup>10</sup> A portrait of Frank O’Connor, moreover, appeared in advertisements for *Atlas Shrugged*, along with the question “Who is John Galt?”

She did not remember when she thought of the idea of “Who is John Galt?”—and she wished she could remember. “It’s that fantastic, imagined or gimmick element. It kind of captures the spirit of it for me. And I think because it does it so precisely is why it feels as if I always had the idea, I don’t remember when it first occurred.”<sup>11</sup>

Within the context of the novel, too, no one remembers with certainty when the catch phrase first occurred. Jeff Allen tells the story of Starnesville and of the engineer who walked out of the meeting of the Twentieth Century Motor Company, saying he would put a stop to all this. Although Jeff Allen knows who John Galt was, he is not certain about the specific origin of the phrase. “Who is John Galt?” means: something is wrong, and no one knows why or how to fix it. “Who is John Galt?” means: distress and disappointment, without a clear source. The men who had seen the engineer walk out of the factory meeting came to believe that John Galt may have cursed them, and that he may have been responsible for everything that had gone wrong since. Perhaps, says Jeff Allen, others heard them attributing the decline to John Galt, and asked a question about the identity of this person—yet never really expected to find an answer, because the question came to mean that any search for any answer is doomed, because no effect has a known cause. What is most offensive about the catchphrase is that it is a kind of statement, rather than a question. As a statement, it means: I don’t know why the world has gone wrong, and I don’t care to know, and I just don’t care, about anything. It is similar to one of the meanings of the Russian expression *chto delat’* (literally, “what to do”). These two words can signify “What must be done” (a statement, a program) or “What should be done?” (a question, a request for guidance) or, as in the expression “Who is John Galt,” “There is nothing to be done about that” or “It is useless to ask what anyone could do.”

Ayn Rand did not offer any explanation of the exact formulation of the phrase. She herself appears not to have come up with it through deliberate selection or through the rejection of alternatives. There is no page in her notes with alternative versions of the question, for example What is John Galt? Where is John Galt? And so forth. I will offer here a guess about a possible connection between the catchphrase and an insight that Ayn Rand

identified (in one of her very early preparatory notes) as the most important point in the novel.

She wrote this note in Chatsworth, California, on January 1, 1945, when she was almost forty years old. It was a tradition for Ayn Rand to write on New Year's Day, in order to begin the year as one wished it to continue. From her note:

The course of each great cultural step forward runs like this: a genius makes a great discovery; he is fought, opposed, persecuted, ridiculed, denounced in every way possible; he is made a martyr—he has to pay for his discovery and for his greatness, pay in suffering, poverty, obscurity, insults, sometimes in actual arrest, jail, and death. Then the common herd slowly begins to understand and appreciate his discovery—usually when he is too old, worn, embittered and tired to appreciate that which they could offer him in exchange, money, fame, recognition, gratitude, and, above all, freedom to do more; or long after he is dead; then the herd appropriates the discovery—physically, in that they get all the practical benefits from it, *and spiritually*, in that they appropriate even the glory. *This is the most important point of the book. . . .* The achievements of the great men are embezzled by the collective—by becoming “national” or “social” achievements. This is the subtlest trick of “collectivization.” The very country that opposed and martyred a genius becomes the proud author of the genius’ [sic] achievement. It starts by using his name as the proof and basis of its glory—and ends up by claiming credit for the achievement. It was not Goethe, Tchaikovsky, or the Wright brothers who were great and achieved things of genius—it was Germany, Russia, and the United States. It was “the spirit of the people,” “the rhythm of the country,” or whatever. The great man was only the robot—he “expressed the aspiration of the people,” he was “the voice of the country,” he was “the symbol of his time,” etc. The intent in all this is single and obvious: the expropriation of the great man’s credit. After taking his life, his freedom, his happiness, his peace, and his achievement, the collective must also take his glory. The collective wants not only the gift, but the privilege of not having to say “thank you.” . . . *This is how the*

genius is made the victim of the collective's crime and the whitewash for that crime.

Such is the relationship between the prime mover and the collective. It has been such all through history—and it is sanctioned, demanded, expected, held to be virtuous by mankind's moral codes and philosophies. *It is against this that the prime movers go on strike in my story. . . . This is the basis of the whole story.*<sup>12</sup>

Listen to her emphasis: the prime movers are on strike against not only the *physical exploitation* of the genius by the collective, but also the *spiritual appropriation of the credit*. The great man as an individual genius is obliterated, subsumed, forgotten. Who cares who *he* is, after all? Who is that John Galt, anyway? The question, in other words, is a statement, and a bad one. It is not a question at all. Asking the question “Who is John Galt?” as a guideline to assigning credit, would be a good thing. But asking the question as something other than a question, transforming the question into an admission that there is no answer, is to say that it does not matter who John Galt is, or who any of those of his ilk are, because any John Galt is “really” the voice of the collective. To ask “Who is John Galt?” as if there were no answer, or as if the answer does not matter, is to deny the facts about the role in human life of the prime mover. And it is those facts—about exactly *who* John Galt is—that the strike attempts to bring to the attention of the world.<sup>13</sup>

As John Galt says, in what Ayn Rand called “Galt’s Speech Junior” (the one he delivers at Midas Mulligan’s dinner party in the valley):

We’ve heard so much about strikes, and about the dependence of the uncommon man upon the common. We’ve heard it shouted that the industrialist is a parasite, that his workers support him, create his wealth, make his luxury possible—and what would happen to him if they walked out? Very well. I propose to show to the world who depends on whom, who supports whom, who is the source of wealth, who makes whose livelihood possible and what happens to whom when who walks out. (741)

When he says this, incidentally, he is quoting almost exactly a paragraph that Ayn Rand wrote in her notes as she planned her novel.<sup>14</sup> She herself was the one who proposed to show the world what happens to whom when who walks out. And she did.

Her notes on *Atlas Shrugged* shed light not only on her early thought about the novel's purpose, but also about her early plans for the characterization of John Galt. There are indications in her earliest notes that she intended the novel to have a longer time span. As she said:

When I was first considering how to implement the theme, how to construct the novel, I thought of having the strike start at least three generations earlier, and have a prologue about the originator of the strike, so that Galt would be the hero of the story, but he would be the last generation of the strike. He's the one who finally brings it to victory. And the reason why I thought that was naturalistic, in effect, or realistic. I didn't think the effect of such a strike could be felt in one generation. But very soon after I began to consider the story in more detail, I realized that a certain amount of foreshortening can be possible, that the theme could stand it. You see, if I had done it the other way, it would have had to be a much more realistic novel.

This was not a story to handle realistically, in this sense, because it's irrelevant to the theme whether certain developments take a very long time or a few months. What's essential is what *does* happen.<sup>15</sup>

She did not want to weaken the story, or the hero.

Even before she had decided against the multiyear span, she had chosen the novel's bookends. By New Year's Day of 1945, she had decided to open the story with the bum's asking "Who is John Galt?" and to end the novel with Galt's saying "The road is cleared. We're going back."<sup>16</sup>

On April 6, 1946, more than a year later, she began five months of sustained preparations, and a large body of notes. The earliest of these include the creation of John Galt legends, the existence of Galt's brilliant invention, the meeting of Galt and Dagny in the valley, the line "Most of you will never know who is John Galt," and the line "This is John Galt speaking."<sup>17</sup>

Her notes contain her preparations and early thoughts for several important elements of Galt's characterization, specifically: his basic nature and his relationships with other characters, his connection with the catchphrase, his romance with Dagny, his temptations, and the torture sequence. A full study of the notes is beyond my scope. I will report, selectively, on what her notes show about the characterization of John Galt: what she retained, what she omitted, what she changed. Although many elements of Galt



were present from the beginning, Ayn Rand made some new, purposeful choices while she was writing.

She described Galt's basic nature as follows, in early April 1946:

*John Galt—energy. Activity, competence, initiative, ingenuity, and above all intelligence. Independent rational judgment. The man who conquers nature, the man who imposes his purpose on nature. Therefore, Galt is an inventor, a practical scientist, a man who faces the material world of science as an adventurer faces an unexplored continent, or as a pioneer faced the wilderness—something to use, to conquer, to turn to his own purposes. In relation to the creators—he is the avenger. (He is “the motor of the world.”)*<sup>18</sup>

What she wrote here remained relevant to the final form of the characterization: energy, initiative, intelligence, independence, the avenger of the creators. Two months later, she described him further:

No progression here (as Roark had none). He is what he is from the beginning—integrated (indivisible) and perfect. No change in him, because *he has no intellectual contradiction and, therefore, no inner conflict.*

His important qualities (to bring out):

*Joy in living—the peculiar, deeply natural, serene, all-pervading joy in living which he alone possesses so completely in the story. . . . It is present even when he suffers (particularly in the torture scene)—that is when the nature and quality of his joy in living is startling and obvious, it is not resignation or acceptance of suffering, but a denial of it, a triumph over it. . . . (He laughs, as answer to the crucial question of the torture scene.)*

(The worship of joy as against the worship of suffering.)

Self-confidence, self-assurance, the clear-cut, direct, positive action, no doubts or hesitations.

The magnificent innocence—the untroubled purity—a pride which is serene, not aggressive—“the first man of ability who refused to feel guilty.”<sup>19</sup>

All of these qualities, too, are relevant to the final form of the characterization. John Galt exemplifies joy in living, self-

confidence, innocence, integration, and denial of the importance of suffering.<sup>20</sup>

She made a note, in July, about his *distinctiveness* and his perfection:

Make clear that Galt is that rare phenomenon (perhaps the *rarest*)—a philosopher and inventor at once, both a thinker and a man of action. That is why he is the *perfect* man, the perfectly integrated being. One indication of this—the fact that Galt was the star pupil, and favorite pupil, in college of both the Philosopher and the Professor. In fact, Galt was the only student who took such a peculiar (to the college authorities at the time) combination of courses.<sup>21</sup>

Comparing this note to the finished text, we notice that Ayn Rand ultimately decided not to make Galt “the only star pupil of both the philosopher and the professor.” Instead, she gave him two friends who also excelled in both physics and philosophy. In the early stage of planning, evidently, she had not planned the integration of Francisco d’Anconia and Ragnar Danneskjöld into the narrative.

The note also indicates what she sees as perfect integration. Galt is not merely a thinker, but a thinker and a man of action at once. Her inspiration for Galt’s perfect integration, as she describes it here, was her own life and work: she herself was one of the leads for the characterization of John Galt. We see this from her introspective comments.

On May 4, 1946 (two months earlier), she had written in her notes:

In my own case, I seem to be both a theoretical philosopher and a fiction writer. . . . Philosophical knowledge is necessary in order to define human perfection, but I do not care to stop at the definition; I want to *use* it, to apply it in my work (in my personal life, too—but the core, center and purpose of my personal life, of my *whole* life, is my work). . . . *This last* is my final purpose, my end; the philosophical knowledge or discovery is only the means to it. . . .

I wonder to what extent I represent a peculiar phenomenon in this respect; I think I represent the proper integration of a complete human being. Anyway, *this* should be my lead for the character of John Galt; *he*, too, is a combination

of an abstract philosopher and a practical inventor;  
the thinker and the man of action, together.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to her preparations for conveying an aspect of Galt's basic nature, she made notes about his *relationships* with the other characters. On April 13, 1946, she wrote that he "must be that which is lacking in the lives of all the strikers. It is he who specifically (in events essential to and proceeding from his nature) solves their personal stories, fills the lack, gives them the answer."<sup>23</sup>

Two months later, she elaborated as follows:

Here is what Galt represents to them (in specific story terms):

*For Dagny*—the ideal. The answer to her two quests: the man of genius and the man she loves. The first quest is expressed in her search for the inventor of the engine. The second—her growing conviction that she will never be in love (and her relations with Rearden).

*For Rearden*—the friend. The kind of understanding and appreciation he has always wanted and did not know he wanted (or he thought he had it—he tried to find it in those around him, to get it from his wife, his mother, brother, and sister).

*For Francisco d'Anconia*—the aristocrat. The only man who represents a challenge and a stimulant—almost the "proper kind" of audience, worthy of stunning for the sheer joy and color of life.

*For Danneskjöld*—the anchor. The only man who represents land and roots to a reckless wanderer, like the goal of a struggle, the port at the end of a fierce sea voyage—the only man he can respect.

*For the composer* [Richard Halley]—the inspiration and the perfect audience.

*For the philosopher* [Hugh Akston]—the embodiment of his abstractions.

*For Father Amadeus* [a priest, who was ultimately dropped from the plan]—

the source of his conflict. The uneasy realization that Galt is the end of his endeavors, the man of virtue, the perfect man—and that his means do not fit this end, that he is destroying his ideal for the sake of those who are evil.

*To James Taggart*—the eternal threat. The secret dread. The reproach. His guilt. He has no specific tie-in with Galt—but he has that constant, causeless, unnamed, hysterical fear. And he recognizes it when he hears Galt’s broadcast and when he sees Galt in person for the first time.

*To the professor* [Dr. Robert Stadler]—his conscience. The reproach and reminder. The ghost that haunts him through everything he does, without a moment’s peace. The thing who says “*No*” to his whole life.<sup>24</sup>

She followed through on some of these notes, but not all. She followed through with these plans with regard to Dagny, James Taggart, and the professor, who became Robert Stadler. In the case of Rearden, however, the role of Rearden’s friend was played by Francisco, not Galt. In the novel as Ayn Rand eventually wrote it, moreover, she did not provide specific story terms and development to explain what Galt offered to Danneskjöld, to the composer, to the philosopher, or to Francisco. She had, at an early stage, envisioned doing so, by portraying Galt as an active recruiter. On April 7 and 10, 1946, for example, she wrote a speech for Galt to deliver to “one of those who is unconsciously on strike from bitterness and disillusionment.” Galt’s main point: your generosity to the parasites is harming you. Stop supporting your destroyers. Withdraw your sanction.<sup>25</sup> In her “notes on notes” of August 28, 1946, she assessed this speech as “extremely important & good—for general theme, for Rearden & for Dagny.”<sup>26</sup> She thought of Galt as having a sequence or scene with Rearden.<sup>27</sup> Hence, in her earlier plans for the novel, we were to hear more of the explanation of the strike along the way, and in Galt’s voice, and we would also have seen more of him in interaction with the strikers he was recruiting.

Why did she change her plan? I surmise that there were at least two reasons. One is that Francisco, who was initially simply one of the colorful strikers, became more important in the novel until he was, as she said, the “second lead.” He became Dagny’s

childhood friend and first lover. He became the one to articulate why Atlas should shrug. And as Ayn Rand thought more and wrote more about Francisco, it made sense to her for him to take over the role of Rearden's friend and as the preview of Galt's recruiting points. Another possible purpose for the change in plans is to increase the tension and suspense as we await the appearance of Galt: to meet him *prior to* the plane crash in the valley would diminish the drama of that scene. In the novel as we have it, we first hear him explain the strike as part of his attempt to recruit the person who will be the last holdout. It is more dramatic than it would be if we had witnessed the earlier recruiting scenes.

Regarding John Galt's connection with the catchphrase, Ayn Rand planned, early, to use his name as a kind of play with language. The catchphrase means despair; when Dagny refers to the name, however, she means the *opposite* of despair. Dagny's Colorado railroad, for this reason, is called the John Galt Line. It represents her repudiation of the catchphrase and her spiritual affiliation with John Galt. And in the early planning stages, on August 24, 1946, several years before Ayn Rand wrote the scene in context, she wrote the lines that describe Dagny's plane crash in Atlantis, lines that explain the conventional meaning of the catchphrase, and Dagny's rejection of that meaning:

And in answer to the earth that flew to meet her, she heard in her mind, as her mockery at fate, as her cry of defiance, the words of the sentence she hated—the words of defeat, of despair and of a plea for help: “Oh hell! Who is John Galt?” (697)<sup>28</sup>

The notes contained additional passages in this vein, implying that Dagny, who is in love with her railroad and the achievement it represents, is also in love with “John Galt”; her love for him is represented by the bracelet of Rearden Metal. For example: In an undated note regarding Dagny's refusal to return the bracelet to Lillian, Ayn Rand wrote: “(it represents the John Galt Line to her.)” “In whose honor are you wearing it?” “Let's say, in honor of the man I love.” “Who is he?” “John Galt.” “Who is John Galt?” “I intend to find out some day.”<sup>29</sup> I would guess that these lines were dropped in order not to undermine the romance with Rearden and not to signal too clearly the eventual union of Dagny with a real-life John Galt. The relationship between Dagny and Galt, and its complications, had an important role to play in the novel—but not immediately.

By the end of her first week of sustained work, Ayn Rand had asked herself a question: “What does Galt do, once he enters the story? Is there no conflict for him?” She answered: “This

should be Dagny.”<sup>30</sup> By July, she had identified the essence of the conflict, and decided that it was to be long-standing. She wrote:

Galt’s reason for being an obscure TT [Taggart Transcontinental] employee: he chose TT for the same reason I did, as the crucial blood system that gives him access to the whole economy of the country; by stopping TT and the key industries connected with it, he can stop the world. But while working on TT, he has fallen in love with Dagny Taggart, long ago (long before she meets him) (he knows all about her activities and her character, and he has seen her in person many times). *That* is his conflict. (He knows that he is her worst enemy, in her terms, her secret destroyer—but he knows that he must go on.) (This is reflected in his attitude toward her in the valley.)<sup>31</sup>

Regarding what Ayn Rand called the “enemy romance” with Dagny, the essence here was that the two of them would be in love, yet at odds. The Dagny-Galt romance is a variation on the enemy romance of Dominique and Roark, in which she acts against him while he waits for her to learn a relevant truth. In *The Fountainhead*, Dominique needs to understand that Roark will triumph in the world, and that it is not necessary to withdraw from the world to preserve one’s soul. In *Atlas Shrugged*, which is set in a very different world, Dagny needs to understand that she will never triumph in *that* world, she will only get herself and Galt killed, and that they all need to withdraw from the world ruled by the death premise if they wish to preserve their souls and lives. The enemy romance was a long-standing element of the novel. Here are the key features: Dagny is in love with Galt before she even knows who he is, he is in love with her before they ever meet, their first meeting does not persuade Dagny to join the strike, and her return to the world places Galt at significant risk. These features were always part of the plan.

In her notes, from early in April 1946, Ayn Rand had planned for Dagny to awaken to sunlight, green leaves, a man’s face, and the recognition of the world as she had expected to see it, when she was sixteen, “We never had to take any of it seriously, did we?”<sup>32</sup> And, although most of the plans for the sequence in the valley were not written until closer to the time of actual composition, Ayn Rand also planned, early and in different ways, the sequences of the contacts between Dagny and Galt, later on, in New York.

In her notes, Ayn Rand planned various scenes of betrayal by Dagny, with different degrees of intent. The April 6 outline had:

“Dagny goes on strike & comes to live with Galt. Dagny James Taggart betrays Galt to the government.”<sup>33</sup> How did Dagny come to go on strike before the end of the book? She finds John Galt in the subway (he is a subway guard), and goes to live with him in a garret. Then: “James Taggart finds her there. She breaks down once—by coming back to give advice in an emergency, to run the railroad, almost in spite of herself. James Taggart gets Iles Galt through Dagny (using Galt’s love for her in some way—through threat or appeal).”<sup>34</sup>

In July 1946, a few months later:

After the desperate search for him—Dagny comes to Galt’s garret. She begs him to help them, to save TT—the temptation through love. He refuses. She asks him to escape—or she will betray him. He hands her the phone.<sup>35</sup>

“The temptation through love,” evidently, means the temptation to abandon his strike for Dagny. This scene, viewed from the perspective of the completed novel, seems to be in violation not only of Dagny’s understanding of what the strike means to Galt, but of Dagny’s manifest love for Galt. Ayn Rand initially considered writing such a scene because she wanted to stress the conflict in the enemy romance and to make it dramatic. She found it possible to do so without making Dagny deliberately take action against Galt; Dagny, to be sure, is ultimately responsible for Galt’s being caught, but only because she was followed, and not because she threatened and betrayed him.

In her notes, Ayn Rand lists a number of additional temptation scenes for Galt: “Further temptations: through pity—(Eddie Willers?); through fear—Dr. Stadler; through ‘ambition’—Mr. Thompson; through vanity—the banquet.”<sup>36</sup>

In the final text of the novel, there is no temptation through pity of Eddie, and the scenes with Dr. Stadler, Mr. Thompson, and the banquet are ludicrously *untempting* in that nothing in those contexts has any possible value to offer Galt. I might almost be certain that the “temptations” were supposed to be transparently worthless—except for the fact that she also envisioned a final temptation that was *not* transparently worthless. From her notes of April 23, 1946, at the time of the torture: “word of the approaching catastrophe—his one moment of temptation when he almost speaks out of pity and natural ability, to save them—but looks at the blood running out of the wound on his shoulder and keeps silent.”<sup>37</sup> And again in the outline of August 24, 1946: “Man rushes in—Taggart Bridge has collapsed. Galt’s single moment of temptation—but he keeps silent.”<sup>38</sup>

This final temptation of Galt, however, eventually drops out of the outlines. In the novel, Francisco experiences a similar moment of temptation when Rearden tells him that he has purchased a shipment of d'Anconia copper: "His hand was reaching for the telephone, but jerked back" (495). Dagny, too, has a final, wrenching temptation when she hears that the Taggart Bridge is gone: "She leaped to her desk and seized the telephone receiver. Her hand stopped in mid-air" (1138). Galt, however, was always in full control of himself, after all (and, for that matter, *before* all), and never lost focus. Why did Ayn Rand ever plan such a temptation for him? Perhaps to emphasize that if he could be tempted, it would have to be by the desire to exercise his ability, not by fear or vanity or power. No other temptation could tempt him. The issue of the torture sequence does not even rise to the level of a temptation.

Ayn Rand had written: "If Dagny is the leading figure and carries the story, then the climax must be the destruction of TT (and almost the destruction of John Galt) by her attempts to deal with the parasites."<sup>39</sup> The torture scene itself is identified as the climax. Ayn Rand initially planned for Galt to give an important speech at this point. On April 28, 1946, during the first month of her sustained work on the novel, she wrote part of that projected speech:

He tells the men in the room that torture is the only weapon they have—and its power is limited by his own will to live. "You can get away with it only so long as I have some desire of my own to remain alive, for the sake of which I will accept your terms. What if I haven't? What if I tell you that I wish to live in my own kind of world, on my own terms—or not at all? This is how you have exploited and tortured us for centuries. Not through *your* power—but through *ours*. Through our own magnificent will to live, which you lack; the will that was great enough to carry on, even in chains and tortures. Now we refuse you that tool—that power of life, and of loving life, within us. The day we understand this—you're finished. Where are your weapons now? Go ahead. Turn on the electric current."<sup>40</sup> On August 28, 1946, in her notes on notes, she assessed this speech as "extra important" (underlined twice).<sup>41</sup>

In the novel as she wrote it, Galt makes no such speech in the torture chamber. It is not necessary. He has made these points, in words, before. Instead, his serenity and contempt in this scene, without any further exposition, illustrate his invulnerability; his enemies are revealed as powerless, and he is no longer in danger when the rescuers arrive.

The sheer amount and detail of the notes for *Atlas Shrugged* make these notes an important record of the creative



decisions Ayn Rand made about the characterization of Galt, especially the changes.<sup>42</sup> From these notes, she wrote her drafts, generally writing straight through the chapters as we know them. I will look, very selectively, at the editing of the first draft of the manuscript, in sections pertaining to Galt, in order to see additional examples of creative revisions.

Here, for example, is a descriptive passage in which she labored to convey Dagny's first sight of Ken Danagger in the valley, and her memory of the day she sat outside Danagger's office while Galt was persuading him to quit. The goal here is to convey Dagny's awareness that Galt had been behind the door, unreachable, and that now she knows who he is and what he is, that they love each other, and that he is still unreachable.

The first draft has many versions of this passage.<sup>43</sup> Here is one:

The torture of that hopeless waiting had come back to her, strangely more real than before, not as a memory of pain, but as an immediate sensation of the present. She wondered why the pain had grown more intense.

Here is another version of this moment:

It was the sudden despair of knowing that the width of a single door which she could not open, had separated her from the door of that office, how much had depended on it, how much she had missed. She was thinking of Ken Dannager's fate and of the purpose that had brought her to his office. But somewhere within the stillness, unacknowledged and unnamed, was the thought that she had been separated by the width of a single, closed door from the sight of a face that looked like soft metal poured into harsh planes, with dark, unflinching, green eyes.

And here is the final version, in the published text:

she stood reliving their last encounter: the tortured hour of waiting, then the gently distant face at the desk and the tinkling of a glass-paneled door closing upon a stranger.

It was so brief a moment that two of the men before her could take it only as a greeting [those two men are Andrew Stockton and Ken Danagger]—but it was at Galt that she looked when she raised her head, and she saw him looking at her

as if he knew what she felt—she saw him seeing in her face the realization that it was he who had walked out of Danagger’s office that day. His face gave her nothing in answer: it had that look of respectful severity with which a man stands before the fact that the truth is the truth. (725)

We can see Ayn Rand’s intention in all of the versions. The final version, however, shortens the description of Dagny’s thoughts and emphasizes Galt’s understanding of what she is thinking, and his response. The final version captures the essentials of Dagny’s pain and longing, and conveys also Galt’s knowledge of her and his acknowledgment of that knowledge, and of all its consequences and implications.

Here is an example of the editing of a passage of dialogue, which was ultimately removed from the manuscript. In the final text, as in the manuscript, Ellis Wyatt tells her about his new process regarding shale oil, and the reasons he is happier in the valley than he was in the outside world. Afterwards, in the manuscript, she speaks with Galt as follows:

“Funny that I feel as if I’m less afraid to speak to him [Wyatt] than to anyone else here.”

“It’s not like you to be afraid to speak to anyone.”

“You know that?”

“Yes. So it’s not those you speak to that you’re afraid of.”

She said openly: “That’s one thing I’d rather you didn’t know.”

“But I do.”

She remained silent, then said: “You’re not making it any easier for me—in the way of a lesson about this place.”

“I’m making it as hard as possible.”<sup>44</sup>

Galt is showing Dagny what he knows about her (although he has not yet told her how long he has observed her). Part of what he knows here, is that she is not asking Galt the sort of questions she asked Wyatt, and that her selective reticence is revealing. She acknowledges that he is making it hard for her to learn about the place, and he says that he is trying to make it hard. From this sequence, the final lines are the ones that remain, and the context is changed so that the conversation in question takes place after Galt shows her the gold coins (728). The intention of the revision, I believe, was to remove the discussion of Dagny’s fear (which is not quite the right way to identify her emotion regarding Galt),

while retaining Galt's implacability: I am making it as hard as possible.

Similarly purposeful revisions can be seen in the editing of Galt's Speech, which Ayn Rand expected to complete in, at most, three months, and that instead took her two years. Her notes show that, in addition to all the thinking she did that was not on paper, she made notes for Galt's Speech in 1947 and 1948, then outlined the key points in 1949; wrote more in 1951, outlined again in 1953, and wrote for two years (1953–1955), including more notes while writing, in 1954.<sup>45</sup> The first page of the chapter "This Is John Galt Speaking" is dated July 4, 1953; the final page of the speech is dated October 13, 1955.<sup>46</sup>

The major changes in Galt's Speech, the large-scale editing, took place on the pages Ayn Rand did not preserve. She said that she struggled with the structure; there is, however, nothing in the notes or manuscripts that would be the equivalent of a speech organized by some other principle, for example, beginning with metaphysics or epistemology. She also said that it was important, and challenging, to tie the substance and style of this speech to the fictional context. The surviving pages of the manuscript do not provide indications of passages of starkly different substance or style. What we see in her first-draft manuscript, generally speaking, are two sorts of changes: some new development and clarification, added to what she initially wrote, and some omissions of material that is excellent, philosophically and literarily, but that she appears to have cut because the speech was clear and complete without this material.<sup>47</sup> I will provide selected examples of the additions, and then of the subtractions.<sup>48</sup>

The most philosophically significant revisions were in the wording of Ayn Rand's theory of value. In this area, there are several additions and clarifications.

In Galt's explanation for the need for a code of values, he says, in the draft: "A being of volitional consciousness has no automatic course of behavior. He needs a code of values to guide his actions. 'Value' presupposes a standard, a purpose and the necessity of making a choice" (96). "Value," was initially undefined. In between the lines, however, Ayn Rand adds: "'Value' is that which one seeks to gain; 'virtue' is the action by which one gains it." In the final text, John Galt ultimately tells us that value is "that which one acts to gain and keep" (1012).

In the first-draft manuscript: "No alternatives and no questions of value enter the existence of inanimate matter" (96). In the text, longer and stronger: "There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence—and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. The

existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not; it depends on a specific course of action” (1012).

Similarly, the manuscript shows a refining of the description of life. Galt adds, between the lines, the description of life as “a process of self-sustaining action” (97), later revised to “a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action” (1013).

Several paragraphs later, the draft contains the following two sentences: “Man has no automatic code of survival. He has no automatic knowledge of what is good for him or evil” (98). What sentence, in the final text, was added in *between* these two sentences? After “Man has no automatic code of survival,” the final text adds: “His particular distinction from all other living species is the necessity to act in the face of alternatives by means of *volitional choice*” (1013).

This paragraph is followed, in the final text, by a paragraph that does not appear in the draft. The new paragraph reads: “A living entity that regarded its means of survival as evil, would not survive. A plant that struggled to mangle its roots, a bird that sought to break its wings, would not remain for long in the existence they affronted. But the history of man has been a struggle to deny and to destroy the mind” (1013).

The first sentence states the point; the second provides two examples (the plant that aims to mangle its own roots, the bird that intentionally breaks its wings). The third sentence relates the point to the context of the speech. The examples implicitly relate the point to living entities, within the novel, that did not survive, that is, to Cherryl Taggart and the Wet Nurse. Cherryl is “a plant with a broken stem,” who asks Dagny how she managed to remain “unmangled,” and who sees the earth as “littered with mangled cripples” (892, 891, 906). Tony, the Wet Nurse, with the disadvantage of a college education, “perished in his first attempt to soar on his mangled wings” (995).

Another significant philosophical revision relates to life as the standard of value and one’s own life as the purpose. The final text includes a new paragraph: “Man’s life is the *standard* of morality, but your own life is its *purpose*. If existence on earth is your goal, you must choose your actions and values by the standard of that which is proper to man—for the purpose of preserving, fulfilling and enjoying the irreplaceable value which is your life” (1014, versus 104A in the draft).

Another important passage in this area, *new* in the *text*, appears in the discussion of the axioms of existence and consciousness.

Whatever the degree of your knowledge, these two—existence and consciousness—are axioms you cannot escape, these two are the irreducible

primaries implied in any action you undertake, in any part of your knowledge and in its sum, from the first ray of light you perceive at the start of your life to the widest erudition you might acquire at its end. Whether you know the shape of a pebble or the structure of the solar system, the axioms remain the same: that *it* exists and that you *know* it. (1015–16)<sup>49</sup>

Considering the importance of the axioms, one can see why Galt thought that “existence exists” merited an additional paragraph of clear explanation, with some relevant concretes.

The manuscript shows the addition of another important paragraph:

That which you call your soul or spirit is your consciousness, and that which you call “free will” is your freedom to think or not, the only will you have, your only freedom, the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life and your character. (1017)

From the perspective of stylistic flow, the paragraph is an interpolation.<sup>50</sup> The previous paragraph ends as follows: “there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking.” The following paragraph begins with a natural transition: “Thinking is man’s only basic virtue, from which all others proceed.” In the manuscript, the new paragraph appears, by itself, on 120A. From the perspective of philosophical coherence, however, Galt is right to introduce, here, the term “free will” to describe the choice to think.

Other additions, though not always as fundamental, add integration. In the final text, Ayn Rand added a new sentence to the paragraph describing “the guilty secret that you have no desire to be moral” (378–79 in the draft): “Existence among you is a giant pretense, an act you all perform for one another, each feeling that he is the only guilty freak, each placing his moral authority in the unknowable known only to others, each faking the reality he feels they expect him to fake, none having the courage to break the vicious circle” (1052–53). This sentence describes well the interactions of the villains, and encourages one to consider the damning diagnosis in the light of past experience.

Another textual revision contributes a new paragraph on another important matter: the initiation of force. Both draft and text have Galt say: “no man may *initiate*—do you hear me? no man may *start*—the use of physical force against others” (158 in the draft, 1023 in the text). The text continues: “To interpose the threat

of physical destruction between a man and his perception of reality, is to negate and paralyze his means of survival; to force him to act against his own judgment, is like forcing him to act against his own sight. Whoever, to whatever purpose or extent, initiates the use of force, is a killer acting on the premise of death in a manner wider than murder: the premise of destroying man's capacity to live."

Yet another textual revision shows Galt exposing the dangerous underpinnings of Kant's attack on reason. After the paragraph, in both draft and text, stating "The restriction they seek to escape is the law of identity" (245 in the draft, 1036 in the text), the final text adds:

Those who tell you that man is unable to perceive a reality undistorted by his senses, mean that they are unwilling to perceive a reality undistorted by their feelings. "Things as they are" are things as perceived by your mind; divorce them from reason and they become "things as perceived by your wishes."

Now a few examples of outtakes.

Here, for example, is a sentence that initially followed the phrase "the horror of a perpetual unknown" (1037 in the text):

They have created, within the vacuum of their arrested mind, the miraculous universe they wanted, where nothing is certain or solid, where entities melt at their touch, where they tremble, unable to know when the wine they drink will turn into a rock inside their throat, unable to predict what terror is advancing upon them from behind the corner they forbade their mind to see. (250 in the draft)

Here is an omitted paragraph about altruism (initially following "non-you" on 1031 in the text): "If you live to serve your neighbors, if you surrender the shirt off your back, your wife's honor and your children's food to a drunkard on the north of you and a pimp on the south—it is not their characters that motivate your action and make your behavior moral, it is not to specific entities that you owe the blood of your sacrifice, it is not to Smith or Jones, but to that shifting zero which is 'non-I'" (209–10 in the draft).

Omitted from the paragraph about those who are making an effort not to understand (1066 in the text): "It was my goal—and I have succeeded—to establish a state of existence where no one would pay for evasions of reality except the evaders themselves" (474 in the draft).

Omitted from the paragraph that begins: “You, who are half-rational, half-coward, have been playing a con game with reality, but the victim you have conned is yourself” (1054–55 in the text) is the following passage on the psychological consequences of evasion:

Every time you cheated, the lens of your mind had contracted to permit you not to see, every time you obtained the unpaid for, it was paid for by the shrinking of your brain, the extent to which you dared not face your own consciousness, was the extent of your progressive blindness to existence, whenever you tried to play it short range, the range of your vision grew shorter—and you turned from a youth of shining ambition with the range of a lifetime ahead, into a noisy evader who uses his talents to get rich in the range of five years—into a frightened chiseller who splutters with anger when someone asks him to consider next month—into a wretch with an animal’s range of the moment, who dares not look within nor without, who scrambles by reflex for immediate prey and has forgotten why, what for and if it matters. (397–99)

The surviving pages of the manuscript, along with comparisons of the initial and final versions, show Ayn Rand laboring to give the definitive voice to her ultimate ideal man, the hero who has, for most of the narrative, been out of sight and out of hearing. The additions and clarifications are improvements, contributions to the presentation. The omissions, however, do not seem to indicate any errors that she decided to correct; rather, they are simply alternative—and often very eloquent—ways of making a point.

For example, very near the beginning of the speech, immediately after “You have sacrificed happiness to duty” (i.e., the end of the third paragraph of both draft and text), the draft has a paragraph that was later cut:

Justice was evil, you said? You called it cruel? No man in your world can now claim any value of spirit or matter as his right, he can only receive it as alms. Independence was evil, you said? You called it selfish? No man in your world can now act on his own, he can only submit to the wishes of others. Reason was evil, you said? You called it arrogant? No man in your world can now judge for himself, he can only have a faith in a higher authority.

Wealth was evil, you said? You called it greed? No man in your world is now above the rank of pauper, holding no shred of property he can call his own. Self-esteem was evil, you said? You called it pride? No man in your world now has cause to feel any emotion but shame. Happiness, you cried, was the most selfish of evils? There is no taint of it left to mar your world, not in any moment of man's life nor in any corner of his soul. (74–75)

This paragraph is powerful. It is replaced by a single sentence of epigrammatic conciseness: "It is your moral ideal brought into reality in its full and final perfection" (1010).

Finally, here is a passage that was removed from the opening section, but that Ayn Rand saved in a file of discards that she liked:

You have heard it said that this is a time of moral crisis. You have mouthed the words yourself. You have wailed against evil [,] and at each of its triumphs you have cried for more victims as your token of virtue. Listen, you, the symbol of whose morality is a sacrificial oven, *you who feel bored by what you profess to be good, and tempted by what you profess to be evil, you who claim that virtue is its own reward and spend your life running from such rewarding, you who resent and despise those you hold to be saints, and envy those you hold to be sinners, you who proclaim that one must live for virtue, but dread having to live for it—listen—I am the first man who has ever loved virtue with the whole of my mind and being, the man who never sought another love, knowing that no other love is possible, and thus the man who rose to put an end to your obscenity of sacrificing good to evil.*<sup>51</sup>

That was indeed John Galt speaking.

In what ways, finally, is John Galt Ayn Rand's ultimate ideal man? He is, of course, the hero of her final novel. Her protagonists, over time, have been getting older. Kira dies at twenty-one, the age of Prometheus/Equality at the beginning of *Anthem*. At the beginning of *The Fountainhead*, Roark is twenty-two (approximately the age of Prometheus at the end of his novella); he is thirty-eight at his trial, which is approximately John Galt's age during the main events of the novel. Each one, in a sense, takes over from the last.



Galt is the ultimate ideal man, more fundamentally, for the reasons she discussed when she thought of herself as a lead for this character: he is the fully integrated human being. He is the creator of a new moral code, and he is the best representative, as Ayn Rand later said, of the Objectivist ethics. He is not only a philosopher, but a man of action, and the mind and body are integrated. He is a man the scope of whose actions is world-scale, and also one who is a hero in every aspect of his life. He is seen against the background of all history and the entire world, and he is seen from the intimate perspective of a woman in love.

One of these intimate scenes is particularly revealing. Months after Galt's Speech, Mr. Thompson asks Dagny, for the third time, where Galt is. She has nothing to say. He adds: "I hope he's still alive. I hope they haven't done anything rash" (1085). Ten days later, she goes to Galt's apartment. Galt opens the door:

She knew that his eyes were grasping this moment, then sweeping over its past and its future, that a lightning process of calculation was bringing it into his conscious control—and by the time a fold of his shirt moved with the motion of his breath, he knew the sum—and the sum was a smile of radiant greeting. (1089)

What is happening here? Galt, obviously, is thinking. About what? He considers the past. The last time they saw each other, in the tunnel of Taggart Transcontinental, he told her: "Don't seek me here. Don't come to my home. Don't ever let them see us together. And when you reach the end, when you're ready to quit, don't tell them, just chalk a dollar sign on the pedestal of Nat Taggart's statue—where it belongs—then go home and wait. I'll come for you in twenty-four hours" (961–62).

Dagny has arrived uninvited, against his express command. Moreover, she is not ready to strike, and he knows it. This is important knowledge about the past. Everything she has seen in the outside world, has not convinced her. Everything she saw in the valley, has not convinced her. Their night in the tunnel, the power of their passion—has not convinced her. The Speech, with its special message to her—"Do you hear me, my love?"—has not convinced her. All of these episodes are in the past, and there remains a powerful question: what is it going to take to get through to Dagny? Galt refuses, wholemindedly, to rescue her against her will. It is her acceptance of the valley, and of him, that he wants. He is there to be ready for the day she chooses to join him. That day (or night) has not yet arrived. She loves him without reservations—but love is not enough. Galt has a significant problem from the perspective of the past.

He also considers the present. Dagny was manipulated by Mr. Thompson into fearing for Galt's life. Galt believes—and is correct to believe—that she has been followed. Dr. Stadler, to be sure, has some responsibility here; he was the one who told Mr. Thompson “Watch that Taggart woman. Set your men to watch every move she makes. She'll lead you to him, sooner or later” (1075). Mr. Thompson agreed, and complied. The goons are due any minute. This threat is another problem, in the immediate present.

And Galt considers the future. One way or another, he expects the outcome to make clear to Dagny what she does not yet grasp plainly enough to be ready to quit. As he tells her: “You haven't seen the nature of our enemies. You'll see it now. If I have to be the pawn in the demonstration that will convince you, I'm willing to be—and to win you from them, once and for all” (1091–92). This demonstration will be the solution to the worst problem: getting through to Dagny.

In other words: all things considered, the arrival of Dagny at this moment is good news. Even with the imminent arrival of the goons. *Because of* the imminent arrival of the goons.

Ayn Rand's characterization of Galt places him in a situation that shows how his mind takes everything relevant into account, gets to the sum, and evaluates that sum as good news.

And that's not the only reason he is smiling, and radiantly. He tells her he did not want to wait any longer to see her, and he would have been disappointed if she hadn't come. Here, too, he is calculating the past (the memory of what they have already shared together), the future (how happy they will be together for the rest of their lives), and also the present: that they are together in this moment, and that this moment is to be relished. He holds her, he kisses her, and he tells her that “It's our time and our life, not theirs” (1092).

At the end of the scene, when the doorbell rings: “Her first reaction was to draw back, his—to hold her closer and longer” (1094).<sup>52</sup> She draws back because she is thinking of the danger. He draws her closer not only in tenderness, to support her for the ordeal to come, but to seize one more chance to embrace her while he still can. It is still their time and their life, and he refuses to miss a minute of it. Then he helps her put on her coat, before he opens the door to the sort of men who will make possible the demonstration that will ultimately convince her. He shows no emotion when his laboratory is destroyed. That loss, too, was included in his calculation. “‘Well,’ said Galt, reaching for his overcoat and turning to the leader, ‘let's go.’”

Who, then, is John Galt? The man we have just seen, in thought and action. Who else but John Galt could have done what

he did, the way he did it? Who else but Ayn Rand could and would have written him?

Ayn Rand said:

*Atlas* was really the climax and the completion of the goal I had set for myself from the age of seven or nine. It expressed and stated everything that I wanted of fiction writing. Above everything else, it presented my idea of the ideal man fully. I can never equal Galt. And there's no point in equaling, and creating another character like it. I certainly can never surpass him.<sup>53</sup>

She went on, after this novel, to write speeches in her own voice, applying her ideas to the world in which she lived. *She* was John Galt, then.

In writing Galt's Speech, she had expressed, for the first time, the essentials of her philosophy—in the voice of a man of action, at a time when the world had to heed him or die. Either-or. In the pages of *Atlas Shrugged*, and beyond them, “this is John Galt speaking.” Consider, in conclusion, one eloquent passage from Galt's Speech:

Whoever you are—you who are alone with my words in this moment, with nothing but your honesty to help you understand—the choice is still open to be a human being, but the price is to start from scratch, to stand naked in the face of reality and, reversing a costly historical error, to declare: “I am, therefore I'll think.” (1058)

I cherish the phrase “alone with my words in this moment, with nothing but your honesty to help you understand.” Every reader, every thinker, every human being is alone with the words, with nothing but his honesty to help him understand. Galt is emphasizing the splendid, sacred independence of the act of thought, which is possible to human beings in this or any moment.

Ayn Rand's direct answer to the question “Who is John Galt?” appears in a letter dated September 1, 1950, while she was writing the ninth chapter of what is now part II: “John Galt is the heroic in man.”<sup>54</sup> The heroic in man, she said later, had always meant, to her, a “sovereign consciousness and total self-esteem,” a world-scale consciousness.<sup>55</sup> In Galt's Speech, he refers to the heroic in the following exhortation: “Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but have never been able to reach” (1069). The expression “the hero in your soul” was part of a quotation from Nietzsche that Ayn Rand had underlined in her copy of an English translation of *Zarathustra*, the

Modern Library volume she bought when she came to the United States, to replace the Russian translation of Nietzsche she had left behind her in Russia. The passage comes from part I of *Zarathustra* (“The Tree on the Hill”). At one point, she had intended to use it as an epigraph for Part III of *The Fountainhead* (Gail Wynand). It reads: “But by my love and hope I conjure thee: cast not away the hero in thy soul! Maintain holy thy highest hope!”<sup>56</sup> Her view of the heroic in man was ultimately different from Nietzsche’s, because in her view, as Galt puts it, the “sovereign rational mind” is “the essence of that which is man,” and also the core of the heroic in man (1069).

Another version of “the heroic in man” is expressed within the novel by Eddie Willers at the age of ten, quoting the minister: “The minister said last Sunday that we must always reach for the best within us. What,” he asked the young Dagny, “do you suppose is the best within us?” (6). More than twenty years later, he again addresses himself to Dagny (although she is present only in his mind). As he tries to start a stalled train, he *answers* the question: “Dagny—in the name of the best within us, I must now start this train! . . . Dagny, *that* is what it was . . . and you knew it, then, but I didn’t . . . you knew it when you turned to look at the rails . . . I said ‘not business or earning a living’ . . . but Dagny, business and earning a living and that in man which makes it possible—*that* is the best within us, *that* was the thing to defend . . . in the name of saving it, Dagny, I must now start this train!” (1166). “The best within us”—is the mind; *that* is “the heroic in man.” Galt himself, of course, had used the same expression in his speech: “In the name of the best within you, do not sacrifice this world to those who are its worst” (1069).

Ayn Rand’s direct answer—John Galt is “the heroic in man”—is essentially equivalent to “the hero in your soul,” which had been a cherished formulation ever since her teenage years in Russia. It is also the equivalent of “the best within us,” or the mind, which is what makes possible business or earning a living. The mind is the heroic, the best within us, and, as Eddie Willers says, that was, and is, and will be, the thing to defend.

Who is John Galt: Cyrus Paltons and the king of the city lost beneath the sea; the glorious man of action and the serene man of thought; the man who integrates thought and action; the man who identified the nature of those who support the world, and who insisted that the world acknowledge *who* those Atlases are; the man who reversed a costly historical error and declared “I am, therefore I’ll think”; the man who smiled in greeting when Dagny, trailing the goons, arrived at his doorstep, and the man who held her closer when the doorbell rang; the heroic in man, the ultimate ideal.

Who is John Galt, and who *was* John Galt?

What does it take to be that man, and what did it take to write him?

## NOTES

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1. The French firm Delagrave published Maurice Champagne's *La Vallée Mystérieuse*, with illustrations by René Giffey, in *St. Nicolas: journal illustré pour garçons et filles*, beginning April 16, 1914, and in its budget magazine *L'Écolier illustré* beginning May 14, 1914. From Ayn Rand's description of the publication as a magazine for boys, it appears that she read the novel in *L'Écolier Illustré*, where it appeared May 14–December 3, 1914. Bill Bucko, whose translation of the novel was published in 1994 by Atlantean Press, identified the Delagrave magazines as the publications in which the novel first appeared. For more information about the serialized novels Ayn Rand read, see Bill Bucko, *Ayn Rand's French Children's Magazines* (Ayn Rand Institute Press, forthcoming).

2. The biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives) are the source for Ayn Rand's comments in this paragraph.

3. Shoshana Milgram, "Three Inspirations for the Ideal Man: Cyrus Paltons, Enjolras, and Cyrano de Bergerac," in Robert Mayhew, ed., *Essays on Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), 177–99.

4. On the basis of Ayn Rand's description in the biographical interviews, Bill Bucko has identified the novel as *Le Petit Roi d'Ys*, by Georges Gustave-Toudouze; he has also identified the magazine in which it was serialized. The publisher Hachette serialized *Le Petit Roi d'Ys* in *Mon Journal*, January 25–July 5, 1913. Ayn Rand says, in the interviews, that she read the submarine story at about the same time as *La Vallée Mystérieuse*. She did not, however, read *Mon Journal* when the issues arrived. She was bored by the first novel she read in the magazine, a story about an orphan—B. A. Jeanroy's *La Marraine de Carlino* (serialized October 5, 1912–January 18, 1913)—and did not become interested in reading the serialized fiction until she read Raphaël Lightone's *Herbelin contre Plock* (serialized April 26–September 6, 1913). She then went back and read the issues that had been piling up unread. Hence she may well have read *Le Petit Roi d'Ys* (1913) at about the same time as *La Vallée Mystérieuse* (1914).

5. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

6. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives). These interviews are the source for all information about her early novel.

7. The friend in question was almost certainly Isabel Paterson. Although Ayn Rand did not publicly identify her interlocutor, she refers to *The Strike* in a letter (October 10, 1943) to "Pat" (Michael S. Berliner ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* [New York: Dutton, 1995], 174).

8. Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943; Signet fiftieth anniversary paperback edition, 1993), 606.

9. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

10. *The Fountainhead* manuscript, dedication page, dated June 10, 1940. The drafts of *The Fountainhead* are housed in the Library of Congress.

11. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

12. *Atlas Shrugged* Notes, January 1, 1945. Published in part in David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 393–94. The *Atlas Shrugged* Notes are in the Ayn Rand Archives. All future references to these notes, unless otherwise indicated, are drawn from the original texts in the Ayn Rand Archives; I will also indicate the pages in the *Journals of Ayn Rand* in which the notes are published in part.

13. The origin of the name “John Galt” is not entirely clear. In her biographical interviews, she specifically disavowed any connection with her friend, John Gall, an attorney involved in the defense of business and businessmen. (Several of Ayn Rand’s letters to John Gall are included in Berliner, *Letters of Ayn Rand*.) Given that the character’s name was not always John, it is highly unlikely that she intended any connection with the novelist John Galt (1779–1839) or any other historical or fictional characters by the name of John Galt. She owned a copy of Katharine Newlin Burt’s serialized novel *No Surrender* (1940), in which there is a strong character named Jed Galt and a weak one named John Peter Galt. The last name of Ayn Rand’s hero was always Galt—perhaps as a sound-similarity with Cyrus Paltons, perhaps to suggest Gold, definitely because she liked the sound. His first name, in the notes of April 1946, was “Iles,” although she crossed out “Iles” and wrote “John.” Why did she change the first name? The name “Iles” is unusual, exotic; perhaps she wanted a name that would *not* stand out, as his character was not to stand out during the years he worked for Taggart Transcontinental. But why was it ever “Iles”? I do not know. She may have liked the sound, possibly because, like the name she had chosen for herself, it began with the sound of the sacred word, the anthem, the I.

14. In “Who Is Ayn Rand? A Biographical Essay” by Barbara Branden, published as part IV of Nathaniel Branden, *Who Is Ayn Rand? An Analysis of Ayn Rand’s Works*, with a Biographical Study by Barbara Branden (New York: Random House, 1962), 216, the passage is quoted as follows:

The collectivists and the champions of the “common man” have screamed for so long about strikes, about the dependence of the industrialist upon his workers, about the workers supporting him, creating his wealth, making his livelihood possible, and what would happen to him if they walked out. Very well. I will now show who depends upon whom, who supports whom, who creates what, who makes whose livelihood possible, and what happens to whom when who walks out.

I have not been able to find this note among Ayn Rand’s papers. I believe it was written in April 1946, sometime before April 24. “Who Is Ayn Rand?” identifies this note as having been written in April 1946, earlier in the month than a second note, beginning “Reverse the pattern of expansion” (a note that can be found in the Archives, and that is dated April 24, 1946).

15. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

16. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, January 1, 1945; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 396.
17. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 6, 1946. In her notes of August 24, 1946, she mentioned two specific legends of John Galt: Atlantis and the Fountain of Youth. *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 533. The legend of Prometheus, which is Francisco's version, dates from April 28, 1949, if not earlier.
18. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 10, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 405.
19. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, June 29, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 512.
20. As Ayn Rand herself said later—the leitmotif of “joy in living” is ultimately particularly characteristic of Francisco (who, at this point, was not yet intended to be Dagny's former lover and the “second lead” striker).
21. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, July 18, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 531.
22. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, May 4, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 479–80.
23. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 13, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 416.
24. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, June 27, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 505–6.
25. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 7 and 10, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 399–404.
26. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, August 28, 1946.
27. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, June 28, 1946. “Final Outline.”
28. Cf. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, August 24, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 537.
29. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, “For Dagny-Lillian,” n.d.
30. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 13, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 417.
31. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, July 7, 1946, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 523.
32. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 11, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 409–10.
33. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 6, 1946. Dagny's name is crossed out in the notes.
34. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 20, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 428.
35. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, July 9, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 524–25.
36. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, January 11, 1949; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 587.
37. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 23, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 432.
38. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, August 24, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 540.
39. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 18, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 419.



40. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, April 28, 1946; *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 471.

41. *Atlas Shrugged* notes, August 28, 1946.

42. The *Atlas Shrugged* notes chronicle a variety of creative decisions. A full account is beyond the scope of this essay. A few examples: (1) The first reference in the notes to Galt's motor—other than a reference to a new invention on January 1, 1945—is May 3, 1946; by June 25, 1946, she had decided that it was to be a major new invention, something that the professor (Dr. Robert Stadler) had stolen from him. (2) The first expression in her notes of the strikers' oath was on May 31, 1947. (3) In the course of planning, Ayn Rand changed her mind about how Galt was to be rescued. In April 1946, he was to be rescued by Dagny and Ragnar. In July 1946, he was to be saved by Dagny alone. In August 1946, he was to be rescued by Dagny, Ragnar, and Francisco. In the final text, Galt is rescued by the entire A team: Rearden, Ragnar, Francisco, and Dagny.

43. These versions are among several that appear on 163 and 164, isolated pages from the manuscript of *Atlas Shrugged*, part 3, chapter 1, in Box 165 of the Ayn Rand Papers (Ayn Rand Archives).

44. 138, an isolated page from the manuscript of *Atlas Shrugged* (Ayn Rand Archives), part 3, chapter 1.

45. She made a note on February 8, 1948, instructing herself to adhere to her note of July 1, 1947, for Galt's Speech; she wrote down, on December 13 and 14, 1949, the key points of Galt's cause; she wrote more for the speech on March 20, 1951; she outlined Galt's Speech on July 29 and 30, 1953; on January 9, 1954, she made notes for the Morality of Death.

46. *Atlas Shrugged* first-draft manuscript, part 3, chapter 7; 1 and 493. With the exception of isolated pages of the manuscript (which, as noted, are housed in the Ayn Rand Archives), the manuscripts (first, second, and third drafts) of *Atlas Shrugged* are housed in the Library of Congress, where I examined them. Subsequent references to the first draft of the manuscript of this chapter (paginated 1–493) will appear parenthetically in the text.

47. I acknowledge the assistance of Rachel Knapp, who helped me compare the draft of Galt's Speech with the final text. I read aloud the first draft of Galt's Speech, and she simultaneously read the final text, "correcting" me when necessary. When we found ourselves to be Dueling John Galts, I made notes about the differences.

48. For additional examples of revisions in *Atlas Shrugged* (in Galt's Speech and in other parts of the novel), see Shoshana Milgram, "Ayn Rand's Drafts: The Labors of a Literary Genius," New Milford, Conn.: Second Renaissance Books, 1998 (taped lecture).

49. In the first draft, this paragraph is entirely absent. The previous paragraph appears on 100 of the draft, and the next paragraph appears on 111 of the draft.

50. Rachel Knapp brought to my attention this interpolation.

51. 86, an isolated page ("to keep from Galt's Speech") from the manuscript of *Atlas Shrugged* (Ayn Rand Archives), *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 656–57.

52. Jeff Britting brought to my attention the succinct poignancy of Galt's gesture.

53. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

54. Berliner, *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 477.

55. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

56. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, translated by Thomas Common (New York: Modern Library, 1917), 60.