

# Adapting *Atlas Shrugged* to Film

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## INTRODUCTION

A motion picture version of Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* has been in development for over thirty-five years. Reports in the media of failed efforts to develop a filmable screenplay and to secure production funding now fill a thick clipping file. Hollywood's first reported interest in the novel as a film property appeared in 1957. Its most recent producing efforts extend to the present; yet, to date, no film has been made. As a result, *Atlas Shrugged* has developed a reputation as an unfilmable novel. The reasons cited by observers vary. These include the novel's 1,168-page length. Its story—the strike by the men and women of the mind against a collectivist world that does not recognize their fundamental value—is a mystery-thriller written in a dramatic, action-adventure style and is well suited to Hollywood. Yet the novel depicts a radical, new philosophy: a moral code of rational self-interest, which is summarized in speeches of daunting length.<sup>1</sup>

During Rand's lifetime, the integrity of *Atlas Shrugged* and its potential film adaptation were a real concern to her. Beginning in 1972 and ending in 1982, the year of her death, she was active in her novel's development as a film, which included her final approval of its script. However, Rand's involvement raised an issue in Hollywood. As summarized by Michael Jaffe, a film producer who spearheaded one such effort:

The reputation [in Hollywood] is that her stories are too idea-filled to make into films; if she had stayed out of it and let them just make the movies, take the best of the plot and not be whipsawed by all the philosophy, they'd be great stories. But it was the whipsawing that always killed it. It was the sense that the stories were too full of philosophy, and the people who controlled the rights to her stories would never let you just go out and *make the movie*.<sup>2</sup> [Emphasis added.]

At issue is what it will take to “make the movie.” Can a screen adaptation of *Atlas Shrugged* render the book's “great” story without the “whipsawing” of its philosophy and plot?

The historic failures notwithstanding, the evidence suggests that Ayn Rand's answer was: *it can be done*. In fact, Rand was writing such an adaptation at the end of her life. Although she did not live to complete her script, the work and its underlying literary method are worth studying, particularly by any writer struggling to adapt the novel today. And *plot* is the *crucial* aspect of her underlying method to study. Plot, she wrote, is a “purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax.”<sup>3</sup> In Rand's view, creating a plot is the primary means of constructing a story. It is also the primary means of conveying a story's content, including its philosophical content. *Atlas Shrugged* is an illustration of her theory in practice. If one knows her theory, then adapting the story and retaining both its drama and philosophy is possible.<sup>4</sup>

As a writer, Rand had a particular view of the connection between storytelling and the concept of *value*. And she viewed plot as a literary means of underscoring the importance of one's values. Further, as a philosopher, she saw a connection between values and philosophy. In the first part of this chapter, the connection between storytelling and values will be introduced and illustrated with examples from Rand's early film experience.<sup>5</sup> Next we will present Rand's view of the link between values and philosophy. We will then consider how complex actions on screen can carry and express, correspondingly, complex philosophical content. Building on this base, the second part of this paper explores Rand's unfinished 1981–1982 adaptation of *Atlas Shrugged*. We will examine the script's basic plot situation and her efforts to elaborate it, addressing

issues of characterization and style as well. Our study concludes with a brief parting comment, intended partly for writers, on how best to proceed practically.

Rand's unfinished adaptation of *Atlas Shrugged* presents scripted action and dialogue that fuses seamlessly with the book's philosophy. The "whipsawing" of philosophy and plot feared by Hollywood is, actually, a groundless fear. At the end of this study, we will see why. We will know a *principle* that will help us adapt an "idea-filled" novel, while keeping its philosophy intact and flowing through a page-turning, filmable script.<sup>6</sup>

## PLOT AND PHILOSOPHY

In the context of storytelling, a plot sequence underscores the importance, the merit, the worth, the *value* of a specific theme by means of depicting the actions taken in its pursuit.<sup>7</sup>

Now let us illustrate this point with an actual plot example from Rand's early work, one that underscores the value of "romantic love." Fittingly, her story was originally conceived as a silent-film scenario. It is a simple situation without a title, yet it contains all the basic elements of drama. The story concerns a young woman whose husband is captured during a war and awaits execution:

Determined to save him, and with only hours left, the [young woman] devises an ingenious method of rescue. She has just begun to carry out her plan when she receives word that their child is gravely ill and needs her. She must choose between abandoning her child and leaving her husband to certain death. She makes her choice: she will not desert the greatest of her values—her husband. The story does not end with disaster: she is successful in freeing him, and their child recovers.<sup>8</sup>

This brief sequence of events brings the value of romantic love sharply into focus. The woman's love for her husband is not simply asserted: it is demonstrated in action. In the face of her husband's imminent execution, she attempts his rescue. However, her devotion to the value of her husband is challenged. Their gravely ill child, another important value, is introduced and requires immediate attention. The young woman now faces a clash of pursuits—a conflict of values—a conflict that must be resolved in one direction or the other. The climax of the story occurs when the woman chooses her husband, rather than her child, as the value most essential to her happiness. The resolution of her choice is the successful rescue of her husband and the eventual reunion with their child, who recovers.

In its brief statement, the story anticipates literary principles true of Rand's future work. Her story incorporates theme, value, choice, conflict, climax, resolution, characterization (her early focus on female protagonists) and even a certain style (film versus literature). But, what is most important, the story's attributes arise during their enactment. They are brought to life in action and organized in a logically connected sequence. This germ of a story contains action, choice, value, pursuit and, most important, conflict. In the context of the young woman's story, asserting a value judgment is meaningless without the enactment of it in reality. And the primary way to underscore the importance of a value is to place the value in danger and to demand effort to overcome the danger in order to retain the value. "Value is that which one acts to gain and or/keep," writes Rand in *Atlas Shrugged*. The value of the young woman's love for her husband is demonstrated by the magnitude of the effort expended by her to "gain and/or keep" him. Plot ("a progression of *events*—and 'events' in this context means actions in the physical world") is the crucial literary element by which a novelist or a screenwriter depicts such actions, actions which are in pursuit of values and—simultaneously—plot is the method of depicting the importance of values literarily.<sup>9</sup>

The scope of the possible action in the novel *Atlas Shrugged* and, therefore, the scope of possible values at stake, define the scope of a potential screen adaptation.

In *The Art of Fiction*, Rand condensed the novel's theme as "the importance of reason."<sup>10</sup> *Atlas Shrugged* takes a specific position on "reason." And the book's view of reason and its place in man's life is enormously abstract. It covers the entire range of man's existence, including the universe in which he exists, his means of knowledge, the standards he adopts in the pursuit of his values, including the values he can properly seek from other men and in what context. The compass of the theme "the importance of reason," raises, in its

very statement, the whole sphere of philosophy. The fullest statement of the theme of *Atlas Shrugged* is: “the role of the mind in man’s existence—and, as corollary, the demonstration of a new moral philosophy: the morality of rational self-interest.”<sup>11</sup>

In the storytelling context that is our focus here, value is tied to plot action and, literarily, values are underscored by such action. In Rand’s silent-film scenario, a young woman seeks to rescue the husband she values. The magnitude of her pursuit expresses her valuation. But how does this apply to more complicated actions and values—let alone the theme of “the importance of reason,” which encompasses not just one or two values, but the universe of values, including the value of human life? Obviously, the role of the mind in preserving human life is a story essential. But how can such a complicated, controversial subject appear on screen? The basic issue to clarify is: What can actions carry in terms of content? How can the complex actions in a screenplay express, correspondingly, complex philosophical content? As a lead, Rand relates an experience at the start of her writing career while employed in a story department under director Cecil B. DeMille:

I had already developed a strong plot sense; but although I could recognize a good plot story, I had not consciously identified what characteristics made it good. DeMille told me something that clarified the issue for me.

He said that a good story depends on what he called “the situation,” by which he meant a complicated conflict, and that the best stories are those which can be told in one sentence. In other words, if the essential situation (not the whole story, of course) can be told in one sentence, this makes for a good plot story.

Rand related how DeMille decided to purchase the story for *Manslaughter*, which was originally a novel and eventually a successful silent film. “A friend,” she continues, “wired [DeMille] in Hollywood advising him to buy it for the screen. The friend included only one sentence about the story: ‘A righteous young district attorney has to prosecute the woman he loves, a spoiled heiress, for killing a policeman in an automobile accident.’ This is all DeMille knew about the story, and he bought it.”<sup>12</sup>

The “situation” is a complicated conflict that lays out the framework of a story. In effect, it is adaptation in reverse, whereby one reduces a larger literary whole to its most important, transferable elements. From the “situation” a story could be repositioned, extended, and enacted in multiple ways. As a silent film directed by Cecil B. DeMille, it was presented without dialogue in the course of a one-hour-and-forty-minutes running time. As a novel, the situation unfolded over hundreds of pages—with subordinate parts, including secondary characters, shifts in time and location—all implied by the central conflict. As a contemporary, feature-length motion picture—or television miniseries—this situation could be rendered in action and dialogue in the course of 126 (or more) pages. In each case, the situation remains the same, while the forms elaborating the situation’s inherent complexity differ in scope.

The pattern is evident in “Red Pawn,” an early film scenario written in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> Philosophically, Rand’s purpose in “Red Pawn” was to expose “the evil of dictatorship and equate Communism with religion. Like *We the Living* [her first novel, set in Soviet Russia], the plot of ‘Red Pawn’ involves a love triangle: a woman becomes the mistress of a Soviet prison commandant in order to secure the freedom of a prisoner she loves.”<sup>14</sup> For the first time, Rand writes explicitly on the subject of plot, philosophy, and film. She calls her method writing in “tiers or layers of depth.”

In a 1934 letter to Kenneth MacGowan, a producer and director, Rand summarizes her theory:

There is only one common denominator which can be understood and enjoyed by all men, from the dullest to the most intelligent, and that is plot. . . . The novelty of what I propose to do—and I believe it is a novelty, for I have never seen it done deliberately—consists in the following: in building the plot of a story in such a manner that it possesses tiers or layers of depth, so that each type of audience can understand and enjoy only as much of it as it wants to understand and enjoy.

Rand explains how her technique would not “burden” the viewer with more meaning than he or she was prepared or willing to entertain. “[T]he same story can stand as a story without any of its deeper implications, so that those who do not care to be, will not be burdened with any intellectual or artistic angles, and yet those who

do care for them will get those angles looking at *exactly the same material.*” [Emphasis added.] She illustrates by reference to the plot situation. On the surface,

[“Red Pawn” is] merely the story of a woman who comes, at the price of a great sacrifice, to rescue her husband from a life sentence in prison and of her worst enemy’s great, unhappy love for her. There is nothing very intellectual or difficult to understand about that. . . . Those who cannot go any further will be held merely by these physical facts of the plot as it develops, merely by the most primitive suspense of the story, by the quality they would enjoy in a plain serial.

But those who can see further, will have before them the spectacle of a rather unusual emotional crisis involving the three characters of the story, and the picture of a life and conditions which they have not seen very often.

Those who want to go still further, will see the *philosophical problem* of the main figure in the story—the Commandant of the prison island—the clash of his belief in a stern duty above all with the belief in a right to the joy of living above all, as exemplified in the woman. And this clash is not merely a matter of details and dialogue. *It is an inseparable part of the very basic plot itself.*<sup>15</sup> [Emphasis added.]

If Rand regarded plot as “*the crucial attribute of the novel,*” then she regarded the plot of *Atlas Shrugged* as its *industrial formula*. The logically connected series of actions leading to its climax are essential to the book’s literary values, its enduring popularity, and its adaptability on screen.

The industrial metaphor is apt. It surfaces in her notes regarding the choice of film director for *Atlas Shrugged*, one on the order of a “Fritz Lang or Alfred Hitchcock,” and whom she describes as an “engineer” and not a “*commedia dell’arte*” improviser.<sup>16</sup> The engineering metaphor is also present in her writings on literature, where she describes the fundamentality of plot in relation to other literary attributes:

The plot of a novel serves the same function as the steel skeleton of a skyscraper: it determines the use, placement and distribution of all the other elements. Matters such as the number of characters, background, descriptions, conversations, introspective passages, etc. have to be determined by what the plot can carry, i.e., have to be integrated with the events and contribute to the progression of the story. Just as one cannot pile extraneous weight or ornamentation on a building without regard for the strength of its skeleton, so one cannot burden a novel [or screenplay] with irrelevancies without regard for its plot. The penalty, in both cases, is the same: the collapse of the structure.<sup>17</sup>

The integrity of plot structure occasioned a long, 1945 letter to Henry Blanke—the Warner Bros. producer responsible for her own screen adaptation of *The Fountainhead*. In this excerpt Rand expressed concerns that apply equally to *Atlas Shrugged*:

Do not attempt to devise a different plot or a different climax. It can’t be done. It took me seven years to work out this one—and I know. Don’t waste your time and money. This story—to be what it is—has to be told in these particular events. If you change them—you won’t get “something like *The Fountainhead*.” You’ll get *nothing like The Fountainhead*.<sup>18</sup>

Rand never wrote about film at length. But scattered throughout her works and commentaries are statements that reinforce the primacy of plot.

In a 1960s radio discussion of the visual arts, Rand offers a more detailed estimate of the medium:

Film is a composite art, made up of an integration of other arts. . . . Film combines all other human arts that the medium can employ. Primarily, of course, it is a dramatic medium; therefore, it involves literature. It is presented visually; therefore, it involves painting. It involves sculpture and architecture, in the sense of the three-dimensional projection of sets. It involves acting, which is an interpretive art. It involves music, singing, dancing—any art form can be used in film. A similar art is opera, which combines drama and music, along with acting and singing. But

film is a much wider composite; it is a sum of all the other arts. Therefore, potentially, film is probably the greatest of the composite arts.<sup>19</sup>

In a 1960s essay on esthetics, Rand describes film's highest expression to date:

As an example of film direction at its best, I shall mention Fritz Lang, particularly in his earlier work. His silent film *Siegfried* is as close to a great work of art as films have come. . . . Lang is the only one who has fully understood the fact that *visual* art is an intrinsic part of films in a much deeper sense than the mere selection of sets and camera angles—that a “motion picture” is literally *that*, and has to be a *stylized visual composition in motion*.”<sup>20</sup> [Emphasis added.]

In 1980 Ayn Rand was asked her goal for a proposed television miniseries of *Atlas Shrugged* and whether the “projection of an ideal man” was her purpose. “No,” she replied, “That’s accomplished by the book.” However, she continued, a motion picture adaptation of the novel,

will make the ideas more vivid. More dramatic. Literature, a book, is a very abstract art, probably the most abstract art. And a television show would be the perfect vehicle to concretize the meaning of the book’s events. Not philosophical teaching so much, as the overall, what I call, “sense of life,” the basic abstraction of the book. To tell people what kind of world it would be. Not tell them. Show them.”<sup>21</sup>

To show the basic abstraction of *Atlas Shrugged* is to show the concrete events out of which the abstraction of the book is formed. The entire arsenal of filmmaking is available to serve that end, but only if that end is guided by the basic principle guiding the selection of the building blocks that form the abstraction, that is, the plot, which makes the story possible—and *adaptable*.

## ADAPTING A PHILOSOPHICAL NOVEL

Let us turn to Rand’s unfinished teleplay “Atlas Shrugged” (1981–1982). In the nature of the case, the evidence is incomplete. Rand finished a little under one third of a proposed nine-hour teleplay of *Atlas Shrugged*. Nevertheless, Rand’s script, as well as her notes and outlines on earlier efforts—written over the course of a decade—are pregnant with insight. These manuscript materials are indicative of her basic “plot” driven orientation. The script’s 326 handwritten pages stop immediately after the successful launch of the John Galt Line and at the start of the Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden love affair. The notes, outlines, and comments on previous efforts are part of an incomplete mosaic of writing preparation, commentary, editing, and actual writing. However, the basic literary principle of plot, which has been our focus, as well as the other basic principles—theme, characterization, style—are present in the materials we will now examine.

### Plot “Situation” and Its Elaboration

As we have noted earlier, *plot* is the “purposeful progression of events . . . leading to the resolution of a climax.” Among Rand’s existing notes, there is no indication that the basic situation or “plot-theme,” as Rand later renamed DeMille’s idea, changes. The script’s theme remains “the role of the mind in man’s existence.” The situation is “the men of the mind going on strike against an altruist-collectivist society.”<sup>22</sup> Albert S. Ruddy, producer of *The Godfather*, who first took on the project of producing *Atlas Shrugged* in 1972, summarizes an early view of the situation:

[I]t was going to be a thriller, a love story, with the underpinnings of a man who wanted to turn off the motor of the world and to restart it again. But it was going to be a thriller and have a lot of suspense, and be a terrific love story. And it was going to be a mystery of trying to figure out who was pulling these strings. The main line was Dagny trying to save the railroad and Rearden trying to save the alloy and how they come together.

Ruddy projected a feature film of two and a half to three hours in length. The challenge was selecting what to omit from the book's 1,168-page length. In Ruddy's words, this involved "knowing what to abstract."<sup>23</sup>

In an undated early note, most likely written around 1972, the process of abstraction begins. Rand elaborates the "situation" by listing a series of discrete events or "keypoints," which sketches the arc of the film's story. The events are essential to the "main line" of focus, which, as Ruddy puts it, is "Dagny trying to save the railroad and Rearden trying to save the alloy and how they come together." Rand's 1972 note is the shortest summary of the film-to-be. And being the most condensed of Rand's notes, in some respects it is one of the most valuable:

## **THE KEYPOINTS**

### **PART I**

The John Galt Line – The search for the Inventor of the Motor – Wyatt's Torch

### **PART II**

The Moratorium on Brains (Directive 10-289) – The tunnel catastrophe – Dagny and "frozen train," her flight, her crash.

### **PART III**

"Atlantis" & Galt – The progressive destruction of Chapter V (the copper wire)

Dagny-Galt affair – the Siege of Rearden Steel, & Rearden quitting – Galt's speech – Galt's arrest – the torture scene – the rescue. The Finale in Atlantis.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere, Rand suggests an underlying reason for the "keynote" events. As presented in a separate discussion from the 1960s, Rand describes what she must show in order to demonstrate "the importance of reason." Her comments mention two of the keynotes listed above: "The John Galt Line" and "The tunnel catastrophe." In the novel (and screenplay) Rand must establish "what reason is, how it operates, and why it is important":

The sequence on the construction of the John Galt Line is included for that purpose—to concretize the mind's role in human life. The rest of the novel illustrates the consequences of the mind's absence. In particular, the chapter on the tunnel catastrophe shows concretely what happens to a world where men do not dare to think or to take the responsibility of judgment. If, at the end of the novel, you are left with the impression "Yes, the mind is important and we should live by reason," these incidents are the cause. The concretes have summed up in your mind to the abstraction with which I started, and which I had to break down *into* concretes.<sup>25</sup>

The basic "situation" of *Atlas Shrugged* and its elaboration imply a number of possible formats, from the simple to the complex. These would determine what selection (or condensation) of characters are necessary to enact the "mind on strike." Aside from the projected nine-hour miniseries and a two-and-one-half-hour theatrical release previously mentioned, several other formats were discussed. There are reports of a four-hour two-part theatrical film as well as two shorter miniseries. The documentary evidence of this is sometimes brief but it is not cryptic. On the contrary, because of Rand's fundamental reliance on plot structure, any note on plot by dint of its inclusion becomes significant. However, the most fully worked-out example is her teleplay.<sup>26</sup>

## **Summary: "Atlas Shrugged" teleplay, 1981–1982**

The first third of her 1981–1982 screenplay opens with a world at the end stage of decay and with the despairing expression: "Who is John Galt?" Rand's adaptation runs close to the novel. This includes the building of the John Galt Line both as a showcase for Rearden Metal and the incident leading to the Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden love affair. The final sequence, which Rand wrote on January 1, 1982, begins with

Dagny awakening in bed, smiling radiantly in recognition of their newly experienced intimacy. Rearden, on the opposite side of the room, is a moment away from exploding in contempt for the both of them—which the altruistic morality he has embraced requires—having succumbed to a sexual desire he views as depraved. At this point, Rand stopped writing, and the script remains unfinished.<sup>27</sup>

This summary appears to follow several earlier and undated outlines prepared by Rand. Of special interest is her handling of the subplot depicting the country's reaction to the building of the John Galt Line. Her adaptation includes the introduction of new characters. It also introduces a dramatic device with unfulfilled implications for the unfinished portions of the script.

In the novel, public opinion against Rearden's new metal is expressed gradually: first through dismissal by James Taggart, followed by the indifference of Rearden's family and culminating in a disinformation campaign initiated by the government to discredit Rearden's achievement. In the script, protests against the metal begin with picketing at the factory on the night that the metal is first poured. The culture's hostility towards Rearden escalates. Rand introduces a "hippie" character leading a street protest. College campus protests are also introduced. The student movement becomes television talk-show fodder featuring negative commentary from intellectuals of the day. In the novel, such views were expressed explicitly and at length during a party celebrating Rearden's wedding anniversary. In the script, the party is retained, allowing for the initial meeting between Rearden and Francisco, but is shortened. In the script, media coverage of the countrywide protest against Rearden's Metal and the John Galt Line is conveyed through the camera point-of-view, moving through the television screen into the actual party in progress.

The unfulfilled implications of television are interesting. Rand frequently planted important dramatic devices at the beginning of her stories. Although there is no evidence of this in her notes, the use of the television "eye" to condense and dramatize the negative intellectual state of the country would have afforded, at the end of the teleplay, a means to revise Galt's speech. Instead of a radio address, Galt's speech could have been dramatized as a documentary proper to television. A visualization of the world "as it is" against Galt's vision of "what it ought to be," while underscoring his own words, is a fertile dramatic opportunity. In the novel, a radio speech is entirely appropriate. The passage of time is not specified nor are we aware of the passage of time during our reading of the speech. This could not be so in a motion picture. Its presentation in a film version would require a dramatic equivalent, an example of which is suggested here. "By the time I come to an abstract speech," Rand commented, "I've given you all the concretes required for you to draw a conclusion—and then I draw the conclusion."<sup>28</sup> Michael Jaffe recalls discussing Galt's Speech, which runs over sixty pages in the novel. Rand read and timed the speech:

It was four hours and twenty minutes or something, so she knew you weren't going to take three nights on TV to read John Galt's speech. So, she said, "You have to find a dramatic equivalent for that. But I am going to edit that speech for you, so don't worry, and I will get that speech down to three to seven minutes. I'll have to do it; no one else is equipped to do that."<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, Rand did not indicate the nature of her own "dramatic equivalent," but the first third of the script is suggestive, nonetheless.

## **A Scene in Detail**

With the basic summary of the extant script in mind, let us now take a closer look at the development of an actual scene, starting with the novel and moving to the script. This will further our illustration of Rand's process of adaptation.

In constructing her script, Rand appears to work from two sources: the dialogue lifted from the novel directly (which will be examined in a subsequent section) and the selection of logically connected sequences. Although the line leading from the "the key points" to any one of the several proposed and one actual (though unfinished) versions is not known, Rand appears to flesh out the plot through intermediary outlining.

To get a sense of the rendering, let us focus first on the opening chapter as it appears in the novel. Then we will turn to the outlines and their narrowing focus, and then, ultimately, to the opening sequence as it

appears in the script. (This pattern of adaptation demonstrated here is true of the finished portion of the unfinished script.)

In the novel, chapter one is appropriately named “The Theme.” The chapter introduces all the basic elements of the story: the time period, the location, the key individuals, but also the overall sense of apprehension of a decaying world entering its twilight. The chapter introduces its characters against the immediate problem of the imminent loss of a vital branch line. This presents both the general disintegration of the railroad and the opportunity for each character to respond in relation to the railroad, setting their course for the remainder of the story. The characters and their responses include: the intelligent resignation of the New York City bum; the diffused apprehension of Taggart Transcontinental Railroad employee Eddie Willers; the drained resentment of railroad president James Taggart; the cynical resignation of chief clerk Pop Harper; the overabundant joy and vitality of railroad Vice-President in Charge of Operation Dagny Taggart; the distant curiosity of the young brakeman; the passivity of the railroad train crew; the courteous professionalism of music publisher Mr. Ayers; the placid emptiness of railroad employee (and first striker) Owen Kellogg when he resigns from Taggart Transcontinental.

In the novel, the only character not related in some way to the railroad is the bum. He is indicative of the world as such. He opens the novel with a particular tone, and it occasions the reflection (via exposition) of railroad employee Eddie Willers. After Eddie’s initial encounter with the bum, the remaining and substantial portion of the opening sequence is devoted to Eddie’s diffused apprehension and his struggle to pull himself together. The novel’s exposition introduces his anxiety, whose origin he cannot pinpoint. He surveys the city, which is in obvious decay, but he sees nothing unusual about it. The sight of a public calendar makes him uneasy but he is not clear why. He tries to remember but cannot recall some popular expression associated in his mind with the calendar. After glancing at the city, which includes the noting of signs of competence among its inhabitants, Eddie shifts his focus to the memory of his childhood friendship with the Taggart railroad family. A giant oak tree stood on a section of the Taggart estate. One day lightning strikes and topples the tree. However, Eddie finds the oak rotted to the center. The memory arises inexplicably. All these thoughts occur to Eddie as he returns hurriedly to the office of the railroad, where he is employed as the assistant of his childhood friend Dagny Taggart. From the street the Taggart Building looms above the city, untouched by the surrounding decay. As Eddie enters the building, he recalls the slogan of his childhood and corporate slogan of the Taggart Enterprise: Taggart Transcontinental, From Ocean to Ocean.

In adapting the script, Rand’s two outlines show her work on chapter 1. The first outline is excerpted from a complete chapter by chapter outline of the novel. The second outline is an (earlier) document containing a smaller subset of sequences to include in an earlier proposed script. After analyzing these outlines, we will examine the opening sequence as it appears in the script.

Here is the complete outline from chapter 1 of the novel:

## **ATLAS SHRUGGED**

September 18, 1977

(Chapter Outline)

### **PART I “NON-CONTRADICTION”**

#### **I. “The Theme”**

“Who is John Galt?” – Eddie Willers & bum. The calendar. Eddie and James Taggart: exposition about Colorado and the Rio Norte Line; Orren Boyle and Associated Steel; the Phoenix-Durango railroad; Ellis Wyatt and Wyatt Oil; ending on “Damn my sister!” Pop Harper and “Your days are numbered.” Dagny Taggart on train, Halley’s Concerto – and the young brakeman. The stop at the red light (general deterioration). Return to New York – the brakeman watching her. Dagny – Jim: the order for Rearden Metal rails. Dagny – Music Publishers, re: Halley’s Concerto. Dagny-Owen Kellogg (he quits inexplicably).

The second outline is a “tentative” selection of sequences selected for an early, proposed version of the script. (Note the inclusion of “plants”):

May 16, 1972

## TENTATIVE OUTLINE (MOVIE)

### Part I

Eddie Willers & bum – Eddie & city: the calendar, The Taggart Building – Eddie & James Taggart (plant: state of Rio Norte Line, Taggart’s resentment of Rearden & Dagny.) Dagny on train: the Halley Concerto – Dagny & Taggart (plant: importance of Colorado, order for Rearden Metal rail) Dagny & music publisher – Dagny & Owen Kellogg<sup>30</sup>

Both outlines contain opening sequences described as: “Eddie Willers & bum – Eddie & city: the calendar, The Taggart Building.” In the novel, these two sequences introduce a decaying world, the slogan “Who is John Galt?,” Eddie Willers and his diffused apprehension, plus his struggle to pull himself together and, lastly, his appreciation for his employer as a symbol of strength. As presented in the novel, these sequences run approximately four single-spaced pages and 2,000 words, including description, dialogue, inner-monologue, and exposition. As presented in the script, the same sequences run approximately 300 words of scenic description and acting direction—and 150 words of spoken dialogue.

The following are the opening sequences from Episode One, Act One. (They have been reformatted and adapted for easier reading):

We fade in on Eddie Willers and a bum standing on a New York City street at sunset. The bum is middle-aged, ragged, with a deeply lined face and intelligent eyes.

“Who is John Galt?” says the bum.

Eddie replies tensely: “Why did you say that?”

The bum mockingly replies: “Why does it bother you?”

“It doesn’t,” he replies sharply. Eddie reaches into his shirt and extends a dollar bill to the bum. “Go get your coffee.”

The Bum takes the money indifferently: “Thank you, sir.”

Eddie starts walking away, but glances up and sees at an opening between two skyscrapers. Long streaks of grime run down the soot-eaten walls of the skyscraper. There are cracks in the walls, and broken windows. In the center of the shot there is a page of a gigantic calendar, erected on a roof that looks suspended in the sky over the city. The page says: September 2.

Eddie’s face fills the screen looking up. His face is tense. He shudders slightly, as if from the cold, and looks away, as the camera moves back to include the bum. “Now what is bugging you?” says the bum.

Involuntarily, Eddie points upwardly: “I don’t like that damn thing.”

The bum glances up mockingly at the calendar: “That? Why his honor the mayor put that up for the citizen’s convenience, so we’d know the day and the date, and . . .”

“That calendar seems to be saying something,” Eddie says interrupting, “some sort of phrase or question, but I can’t recall it. I’ve tried, but I can’t.”

“Oh, I can tell you that,” said the bum, “I know what it’s saying.”

“What?” asks Eddie.

“Your days are numbered” replies the bum.

Eddie looks startled then nods faintly, in reluctant agreement. Then he turns sharply and walks away.

Eddie continues walking down a main thoroughfare. It is Fifth Avenue, but it is obviously decaying; every fourth store window is dark and empty, bankrupt. He turns another corner and stops. The Taggart Building rises in the distance, untouched by decay, in contrast to its

neighbors. Eddie Willers smiles, looking up at the building, and touches his fingers to his forehead in a kind of military salute. Then he hurries forward.

As Eddie enters the building, the camera moves to the sign over the entrance, which reads:

## TAGGART TRANSCONTINENTAL

### From Ocean to Ocean

The scene dissolves to the same inscription on the top of a map, then pulls back to reveal a large map of the United States, crisscrossed by a network of red lines from New York to San Francisco. The camera moves further back and reveals the luxurious office of James Taggart, president of the railroad. [End of sequence.]

As presented in the script (and above), the exchange with the bum includes new dialogue, which explains the meaning of the calendar. “Your days are numbered.” (In the novel, Eddie’s recollection occurs toward the end of chapter one.) The oak tree episode and all references to the past are omitted. The general sense of decay is present. And so is a telling bit of characterization for Eddie: he attempts to conduct himself as usual, which includes a military salute offered to the “untouched” Taggart Building, whose strength and days are numbered, also.

### Characterization

*Characterization* is “the portrayal of those essential traits that form the unique, distinctive personality” of a human being.<sup>31</sup> Rand viewed action and dialogue as the “means of characterization” through which we come to know a character’s motives. “To know a person well,” writes Rand in her lectures on fiction, “is to know ‘what makes him tick’”:

There is no way to know the soul (the consciousness) of another except by means of physical manifestations: his actions and words (not *his words in the sense of philosophical declarations, but his words in the context of his actions*). [Emphasis added.] The same applies to fiction. As part of characterization, a writer can sum up in narrative passages a character’s thoughts or feelings, but *merely* to do that is not characterization.<sup>32</sup>

In the novel, the issue of characterization through dialogue is severalfold. As Rand explains in a 1944 letter to friend and aspiring writer, Gerald Loeb, one must make “dialogue sound as if this is the way people really talk—and yet write it with a brevity, clarity and economy of words never achieved by anybody in real-life talk.” The dialogue must not contain lines without a specific purpose: one “must have every line carry either exposition or characterization—and usually both.” The characters must speak in a fluid, unstilted manner: “[the writer] cannot allow his characters to talk so precisely that they will sound stilted. The trick is to select out of people’s normal expressions those lines that are representative, that can give you—in one flash—the whole idea of the person or subject discussed, while sounding completely natural. It is a very difficult trick.”<sup>33</sup>

The same principles apply to extracting dialogue from *Atlas Shrugged* for use in a film script.<sup>34</sup>

During her lifetime, Rand was amenable to adjustments in the construction of subplots. However, she was extremely sensitive to substantive changes in dialogue that affected changes in character motivation. She approved smaller changes in dialogue, which were expected and necessary. Nevertheless, the identity of a character on film is realized primarily through his action and dialogue. Jaffe recalls: “Every author goes out and spends however many years creating a character and having them speak in a certain way. Why would a screenwriter change the way they speak? I can understand not using all of the dialogue, but I can’t understand changing the dialogue. The whole point is that people read the book because the dialogue is written the way it is, why change it? So she was very upset about that.”<sup>35</sup>

A speech delivered by Francisco d’Anconia illustrates Rand’s process, including the necessity of editing dialogue lifted from the book. In the novel, James Taggart, President of Taggart Transcontinental Railroad, confronts Francisco d’Anconia, a copper industrialist, over his involvement in the San Sebastián mine affair—

an inherently worthless property that has wasted millions in investor money, and which has been nationalized by the Mexican government. Beginning with its short introduction, here is the speech as presented in the novel:

Francisco stood looking at him in polite astonishment. “Why James,” he said, “I thought you would approve of it.”

“Approve?!”

“I thought you would consider the San Sebastián mines as the practical realization of an ideal of the highest moral order. Remembering that you and I have disagreed so often in the past, I thought you would be gratified to see me acting in accordance with your principles.”

“What are you talking about?”

Francisco shook his head regretfully. “I don’t know why you should call my behavior rotten. I thought you would recognize it as an honest effort to practice what the whole world is preaching. Doesn’t everyone believe that it is evil to be selfish? I was totally selfless in regard to the San Sebastián project. Isn’t it evil to pursue a personal interest? I had no personal interest in it whatever. Isn’t it evil to work for profit? I did not work for profit—I took a loss. Doesn’t everyone agree that the purpose and justification of an industrial enterprise are not production, but the livelihood of its employees? The San Sebastián Mines were the most eminently successful venture in industrial history: they produced no copper, but they provided a livelihood for thousands of men who could not have achieved, in a lifetime, the equivalent of what they got for one day’s work, which they could not do. Isn’t it generally agreed that an owner is a parasite and an exploiter, that it is the employees who do all the work and make the product possible? I did not exploit anyone. I did not burden the San Sebastián Mines with my useless presence; I left them in the hands of the men who count. I did not pass judgment on the value of that property. I turned it over to a mining specialist. He was not a very good specialist, but he needed the job very badly. Isn’t it generally conceded that when you hire a man for a job, it is his need that counts, not his ability? Doesn’t everyone believe that in order to get the goods, all you have to do is need them? I have carried out every moral precept of our age. I expected gratitude and a citation of honor. I do not understand why I am being damned. (143)

Here is the same passage with Rand’s revisions, including cross-outs and new words enclosed with brackets:

Francisco stood looking at him in polite astonishment. “Why James,” he said, “I thought you would approve of it.”

“Approve?!”

“I thought you would consider the San Sebastián mines as the practical realization of an ideal of the highest moral order. Remembering that you and I have disagreed so often in the past, I thought you would be gratified to see me acting in accordance with your principles.”

“What are you talking about?”

Francisco shook his head regretfully. “~~I don’t know why you should call my behavior rotten.~~ I thought you would recognize it as an honest effort to practice what the whole world is preaching. Doesn’t everyone believe that it is evil to be selfish? I was totally selfless in regard to the San Sebastián project. ~~Isn’t it evil to pursue a personal interest? I had no personal interest in it whatever.~~ Isn’t it evil to work for profit? I did not work for profit—I took a loss. Doesn’t everyone agree that the purpose ~~and justification~~ of an industrial enterprise ~~are~~ [is] not production, but the livelihood of its employees? The San Sebastián Mines ~~were the most eminently successful venture in industrial history:~~ they produced no copper, but they provided a livelihood for thousands of men who ~~could not have achieved, in a lifetime, the equivalent of what they got for one day’s work, which they could not do~~ [were unemployable]. Isn’t it generally agreed that an owner is a parasite and an exploiter, that it is the employees who do all the work and make the product possible? I did not exploit anyone. I did not burden the San Sebastián Mines with my useless presence; I left them in the hands of the men who count. I did not pass judgment on the value of that property. I turned it over to a mining specialist. He was

~~not a very good specialist, but he needed the job very badly. Isn't it generally conceded that when you hire a man for a job, it is his need that counts, not his ability? Doesn't everyone believe that in order to get the goods, all you have to do is need them?~~ I have carried out every moral precept of our age. I expected gratitude and a citation of honor. I do not understand why I am being damned.

Here is the same encounter presented in screenplay format.<sup>36</sup>

## FRANCISCO

(Stands looking at him in polite astonishment)

## TAGGART

Approve?!

## FRANCISCO

I thought you would recognize it as an effort to practice what the whole world is preaching. Doesn't everyone believe it is evil to be selfish? I was totally selfless in regard to the whole Sebastián project. Is it evil to work for a profit? I did not work for a profit—I took a loss. Doesn't everyone agree that the purpose of an individual enterprise is not production, but the livelihood of its employees? The San Sebastián mines produced no copper, but they provided a livelihood for thousands of men who were unemployable. I have carried out every moral precept of our age. I expect gratitude and a citation of honor. I do not understand why I am being damned.<sup>37</sup>

## Style

Style, Ayn Rand writes,

has two fundamental elements . . . : the “choice of content” and the “choice of words.” By “choice of content” I mean those aspects of a given passage (whether description, narrative or dialogue) which a writer chooses to communicate (and which involve the consideration of what to include or to omit). By “choice of words” I mean the particular words and sentence structures a writer uses to communicate them.<sup>38</sup>

Novels and screenplays are different dramatic mediums with different stylistic possibilities. The run of the John Galt Line is one of the most tightly integrated literary sequences presented in the novel. It conveys both action and explicit philosophical content. Rand's adaptation of this passage for the screen demonstrates her sensitivity to word and content choices across two mediums. The importance of such word and content choices can be seen by comparing the original, more novelistic version of the John Galt Line sequence and its final, more filmic revision.

The successful run of the John Galt Line is a climax of both the first third of the book and the first third of the screenplay. As presented in the book, the run of the train is a physical demonstration of the power of reason. The run brings into focus—both in dialogue and in action—the methodical application of man's rational faculty to the problems of his survival. In so doing, the sequence involves a concern with facts (the problem of a faltering branch line), evaluation (the preservation of a valuable line essential to the continued expansion of industrialism) and action (the successful building of the line in the face of obstacles). It is also the sequence in the novel explicitly dramatizing Rand's view of the unity of mind and body: the integration of thought and

action in “solving the problem of one’s survival,” that is, in successfully pursuing his own life and happiness on earth.

In the novel the sequence is presented from a moving train, crossing the earth over plains and through mountains at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. The train is a machine, a material product of human intelligence. And Dagny Taggart, the person responsible for the train’s successful operation, rides in the cab of its engine. During the ride she experiences the physical consequences of her success—the smooth operation of the train, the integrity of the track bed, the positive, celebratory reactions of those who have come to witness the run—but, as she descends into the heart of the engine’s motor, she also reflects upon the event’s “spiritual” or mental aspects. During a substantial inner monologue, Dagny moves among the moving parts of the train motor and reflects on the unity of mind and body—and the role such a unity plays in the successful run of the train. Dagny’s inner monologue is substantial. The entire mechanism of the engine’s motor was designed with a specific purpose and that purpose originates in a thinking mind. The engine roaring around her is a constant, perceptual reminder of this integration.

There are two drafts of this sequence among Rand’s teleplay manuscripts. (This material is the longest example of editing on paper within the screenplay itself.)

First, Rand prepared this sequence in outline form. (The transcription here omits page numbers.) On one side of the page are the specific actions depicting the sequence. Among these are: “Show speed of train—signal light 2 miles apart,” “attitude of Logan [the engineer],” “Rearden looking down at Dagny,” “Crowd of people under the ‘Stop. Look. Listen.’ signs,” “good description of the start of mountains.” On the other side is the column called “Her thoughts.” Under this column are “Ownership,” “the meaning of this day for them,” “Wish & Fulfillment,” “Mind & body, physical pleasure,” “Who made the engine” and so forth. A total of thirteen physical descriptions are listed as are twelve key “thoughts.”

In the first draft of this sequence, the physical description and the inner monologue are combined in a montage. Rand coordinates specific monologue with specific actions. However, in the final version, which stands in the script, this entire section is cut.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, the translation required to capture the scene in the novel and render it effectively in the script meant abandoning her first approach entirely. In the second version, she omits the inner monologue and its reflection on “mind and body” integration. In notes from the script (reproduced below), she explains her revision:

**Note:** The visual aspects of the following sequence (the train ride) are, properly, the job of the director, and I shall leave them to him. I shall present here only the shot necessary to the progression of the story. I shall not attempt to break down into individual shots the enormous visual complexity of projecting a train traveling through the mountains at a hundred miles an hour. (I have done that job verbally in the novel.)

I suggest that the director read carefully pp. 239–247 of *Atlas Shrugged* (Random House edition), because he has to convey visually the equivalent of what I have conveyed in narrative. He should avoid any suggestion of the notion of “how small is man in the face of nature”—since the meaning of this sequence is: How great are man and his achievement in the conquest of nature.

## THE WRITER’S PERSPECTIVE

Any writer facing the task of adapting Rand’s universe onto the screen will no doubt have heard—and may possibly share—the concerns listed by journalists at the opening of this study: The novel is too long, too idea-filled or too propagandistic in its advocacy of capitalism. In one form or another during her lifetime, Rand faced these same criticisms. She was asked repeatedly whether she was “primarily a novelist or a philosopher” and whether her stories were “propaganda vehicles for ideas, whether politics or the advocacy of capitalism” was her “chief purpose.” Rand replied that “all such questions are so enormously irrelevant, so far beside the point, so much not my way of coming at things.” Her explanation, reproduced below, also serves as a summary of the issues introduced and discussed in this paper:

My way is much simpler and, simultaneously, much more complex than that, speaking from two different aspects. The simple truth is that I approach literature as a child does: I write—and read—for the sake of the story. The complexity lies in the task of translating that attitude into adult terms.

The specific concretes, the *forms* of one's values, change with one's growth and development. The abstraction "*values*" does not. An adult's values involve the entire sphere of human activity, including philosophy—most particularly philosophy. But the basic principle—the function and meaning of values in man's life and in literature—remains the same.

My basic test for any story is: Would I want to meet these characters and observe these events in real life? Is this story an experience worth living through for its own sake? Is the pleasure of contemplating these characters an end in itself?

It's as simple as that. But that simplicity involves the total of man's existence.<sup>40</sup>

If the simplicity of a story "involves the total of man's existence," then we have answered our opening question: Can a screen adaptation of *Atlas Shrugged* render the book's story without the "whipsawing" of philosophy and plot alleged by Hollywood? The answer is: Yes, as long as you incorporate its philosophy into a script by simply *showing* men *living* it—a simple answer that "involves the total of man's existence."

Abstractions like the "the importance of reason" or "rational self-interest" or "the conquest of nature" are ultimately reducible to concrete, specific entities and their actions. The whole goal of a novel (and of art in general) is to express such abstractions by embodying them in a perceptual form. In terms of film, this means the action and dialogue of a script and everything that this implies on a film set.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, every event or fact implies a *value*. Every value pursued (or dismissed) by a character, implies an estimation of that value in action. Philosophy (value) and plot (the facts) do not whipsaw. They are different perspectives on the same real, concrete, perceptible, and, therefore, *filmable* human actions. Each event in *Atlas Shrugged* the novel—whether enacted by an individual or a government, by a hero or a villain—expresses some estimate of the mind and its relation to human survival. The estimate is embedded in the actions of the characters. In other words, to paraphrase a well-known expression: philosophical actions speak louder than empty words. In the literary arts, what empties words of their meaning and turns them into meaningless assertions is any disconnection between a word and the observable, concrete things (and their actions) that give those words meaning. Disconnecting *Atlas Shrugged* from the "logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax" would empty the book (or screenplay) of drama.

A collectivistic society disregards individual effort. (See the attacks on Rearden Metal.) Such a society disregards the connection between independent judgment and its root in the mind, which makes judgment possible. (See the attacks on Dagny as she attempts to build her railroad.) A collectivistic society seeks to undermine the institutionalized protection of such judgment by undermining individual rights. (See Washington, DC, and the pressure group warfare described in the novel.) A collectivist society is antagonistic to the achievement of wealth and the trading of values in a marketplace that is capitalism. (See Directive 10-289.) What happens in a world where men do not think or assume the responsibility of judgment? (See the tunnel catastrophe.) And what is the proper response to such a world? (See the strike by the men and women of the mind.) And, lastly, to the extent that a man struggles to live, to this extent he needs the guidance of philosophy if he wishes to remain alive and achieve his happiness. (See Galt's Speech.)

In a plot-story, the extent to which a man seeks a value and struggles to "gain and/or keep it" is the extent to which he is in both the domain of fiction *and* philosophy. Men and women do not float above or beyond the earth (and reality). They are living beings in *this* reality, who reap directly the benefits (or detriments) of their basic choices: to live or not, to think or not. These are philosophical choices. In Rand's view, such choices are inescapable to real men and women and to their equivalent in fiction. To live and to think or to refrain from thinking, therefore, to die—are actions expressing the two clashing philosophies presented in the novel: the Morality of Life and the Morality of Death. They differentiate the heroes and villains of *Atlas Shrugged*, whose stands on the "role of the mind in man's existence" are enacted over the course of 1,168 pages by what they do. In the words of producer Albert S. Ruddy: "It's knowing what to abstract."

If plot shows us *what* to abstract from the novel, Rand describes *how* to abstract (or adapt) by indicating the state of mind one needs to achieve before doing so:

When you master the relationship of abstractions to concretes, you will know how to translate an abstract theme into action, and how to attach an abstract meaning to an action idea. . . . Only when your mind is geared to dancing back and forth—and I mean *dance*, with that kind of ease—between abstractions and concretes will you be able to give the philosophical meaning to an action idea or the action story to a philosophical idea.<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Dramatizing *Atlas Shrugged* (and its ideas) on-screen is not only possible, it is *necessary*—if the result is to remain *Atlas Shrugged*. Rather than creating obstacles, a thorough understanding of the novel’s plot would clarify the job. But this requires an understanding of the underlying theory of storytelling, without which the book is nothing, and any adaptation is less than nothing. The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is the book’s industrial formula, the key to solving the billion-dollar question weighing, no doubt, heavily on producers, distributors, exhibitors, the viewing public—and, perhaps most of all, writers. How does one adapt *Atlas Shrugged*?—is a question we have attempted to answer here. The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is like the algebraic formula:  $2a = a + a$ . And to paraphrase Rand from another context, any number of specific events may be substituted for “a” without altering the truth of the plot. The situation of the novel is true of a three-hour film and a nine-hour miniseries. Delivered intact, the plot of *Atlas Shrugged* will attract the book’s enormous public and “fill seats.” Without its plot, the public will exit theatres shrugging, and screenings will empty because the screen will be empty.<sup>42</sup>

Rand is feared (groundlessly) in Hollywood for her philosophizing speeches. On the same erroneous grounds, she goes unrecognized for her philosophizing action. For any writer facing the practical job of writing an adaptation today, simply reading the novel will flood him with Rand’s philosophy and its *dramatic* equivalents. But that is not enough. He must put down the book and look out at the world, totally on his own—while taking stock of his own experience—in order to begin dancing, as observes Rand, “literally” between the novel’s abstract philosophy and its concretes.

Ironically, it is not a motion picture with dialogue but a *silent film* that merits Rand’s esteem as the greatest motion picture yet produced. Perhaps Rand’s view of film greatness reveals the truest test of all: not until the writer of record is ready and willing to dramatize *Atlas Shrugged* in *total silence*, will he be able to adapt the novel—with sound, picture, and the “technological radiance” of the medium Rand loved, confident of her drama *and* his own ingenuity in matching it.<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES

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1. This study is confined primarily to works and commentary generated during Ayn Rand's lifetime. This includes items found among her personal papers, interviews or written statements by Rand, or oral histories conducted with people associated with historic efforts to produce a film version of her novel. Since the focus here is Rand's approach to dramatizing ideas, a great deal of interesting material pertaining to the film's development process is omitted, including the evolution of the long format dramatic television or "miniseries," which was anticipated by Rand. Also omitted is a review of innovative legal contracts crafted to insure Rand's control over the script. A longer study would have permitted the use of the interesting literature on adaptation and film esthetics in general. However, since Rand is a philosopher in her own right, and her views on film are comparatively little known, she deserves the special focus presented here.

For a short, informative history of *Atlas Shrugged* producing efforts and the general concerns raised in Hollywood, see Kimberly Brown, "Ayn Rand No Longer Has Script Approval," *New York Times*, 12 January 2007, 9,14 (AR).

2. Scott McConnell, "Interview with Michael Jaffe," *One Hundred Voices: An Oral History of Ayn Rand* (Irvine, Calif.: Ayn Rand Institute Press, forthcoming).

3. Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975), 82.

4. Plot is not the only literary element necessary. Rand held that other attributes of storytelling—theme, characterization, style—are essential, too. However, she regarded events as primary. She writes: "Since art is a selective re-creation [of reality] and since events are the building blocks of a novel, a writer who fails to exercise selectivity in regard to events defaults on the most important aspect of his art . . . . The means of exercising that selectivity and of integrating the events of a story is the plot." Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 82. For a further discussion of philosophy and art, see note 11.

5. "The purpose of all art is the objectification of values. The fundamental motive of a writer—by implication of the activity, whether he knows it or not—is to objectify his values, his view of what is important in life. . . . In this sense, every writer is a moral philosopher." Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, Tore Boeckmann, ed. (New York: Plume 2000), 13–14.

6. The theory of plot (and its associated principles) presented in this paper is Ayn Rand's and flows out of her literary philosophy. Her theory of plot, actually, is the starting point of an examination of film adaptation, including derivative issues (and further principles) that are outside the scope of this paper. However, within this paper's scope is an examination of the connection between plot and *philosophy*. For a complete examination, see Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*.

7. In a narrative film, our primary goal is to depict or show human beings in action, thereby depicting a subject of human interest. Some motivation is involved, something besides the sheer existence of a subject matter. A subject must *matter*. Something about one set of activities (or concerns) sets it apart from another set, something makes this set interesting and worth pursuing to the viewer. This human perspective on any given fact or facts is our *entrée* into the whole realm of values. Rand defined a value as "that which one acts to gain and/or keep." The fact of human valuing leads, in turn, to morality, which Rand defined as an entire branch of philosophy. For a summary of Rand's argument, see Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991).

8. Ayn Rand, quoted in Nathaniel and Barbara Branden, *Who Is Ayn Rand?* (New York: Random House, 1962), 152.

9. Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 429–30.

10. Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 13.

11. Rand defined *philosophy* as a "comprehensive, integrated view of man and man's relationship to existence." Man needs this perspective out of practical necessity. As Rand puts it: "In order to live, man must act; in order to act, he must make choices; in order to make choices, he must define a code of values; he must know what he is and where he is—i.e., he must know his own nature (including his means of knowledge) and the nature of the universe in which he acts—i.e., he needs metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, which means: philosophy." Rand considered esthetics the fifth branch of philosophy. She defined art as "a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments." See Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 45, and Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 417.

12. Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 57.

13. Leonard Peikoff, ed., *The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction*, revised version (New York: Signet, 2005), 149.

14. Jeff Britting, *Ayn Rand* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 40.

15. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 6–9. Although “Red Pawn” was never produced as a film, her work on it, which includes an early screenplay, shows Rand incorporating her theory into the story.

16. *Ayn Rand Papers: 58-12-19*, Ayn Rand Archives, A Special Collection of the Ayn Rand Institute, Irvine, Calif.

17. Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 84.

18. She also states: “You know that people receive a sense of exaltation from this book. And you know that from the sublime to the ridiculous is just one step.” Berliner, *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 245.

19. “Interview with Ayn Rand,” Ayn Rand On Campus: “The Visual Arts,” undated, *Special Collections*, Ayn Rand Archives.

20. Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 71–72.

21. Jerry Schwartz, “Interview with Ayn Rand, Part II,” *Objectivist Forum* 1, no. 4 (August 1980): 1.

22. For a discussion of “plot-theme,” see Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 85.

23. McConnell, “100 Voices,” “Interview with Albert S. Ruddy.”

24. *Ayn Rand Papers: 58-12-19*, Ayn Rand Archives.

25. Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 13.

26. Ayn Rand, “Atlas Shrugged, a Teleplay,” *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

27. Rand, “Atlas Shrugged, a Teleplay,” pp. 1–324, 1–2, *Ayn Rand Papers*.

28. Robert Mayhew, ed., *Ayn Rand Answers* (New York: New American Library, 2005), 193.

29. McConnell, “Interview with Michael Jaffe.”

30. *Ayn Rand Papers: 58-12-19*, Ayn Rand Archives.

31. Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 87.

32. Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 59–60.

33. Berliner, *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 133–34.

34. “She got out her copy of *Atlas Shrugged*, underlined the dialog she wanted to keep, scene by scene. Then she sat down and in longhand on her blue paper, in screenplay form, with the proper formatting, wrote everything down. She got all the way through the first third, and I typed it up for her.” McConnell, “100 Voices,” “Interview with Cynthia Peikoff.”

35. McConnell, “100 Voices,” “Interview with Michael Jaffe.”

36. For full effect, reading the speech aloud is recommended.

37. Rand, “Atlas Shrugged, a Teleplay,” 150–52.

38. Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 94.

39. In the novel this sequence of activity and the monologue omits the measure of a specific passage of time. In reading the novel, one can put down the passage and then resume reading. One can, in effect, reenter the sequence and pick up where one stopped. This is because a novel presents physical space at a high level of abstraction. (The same is true of movement.) The amount of information in a novel sufficient to give an impression of movement, sound, and the passage is far less than what is required in motion pictures. The latter must keep moving, literally.

40. See Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 162–63. On why she wrote *Atlas Shrugged*, see Mayhew, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 230.

41. See also Rand, *The Art of Fiction*, 55.

42. Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, Expanded Second Edition, Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff, eds. (New York: New American Library, 1990), 18.

43. I would like to thank Donna Montrezza and Michael S. Berliner for proofreading assistance and comments; Sharyn Blumenthal for her illuminating thoughts on film theory; Robert Mayhew for his wise and patient editing.