

A Note on Dagny’s “Final Choice”

Allan Gotthelf

Now I’ll tell you what it was that you wanted to tell me—because, you see, I know it and I accept: somewhere within the past month, you have met the man you love, and if love means one’s final, irreplaceable choice, then he is the only man you’ve ever loved.”

—Rearden to Dagny, *Atlas Shrugged* (860)

Rearden is right. Dagny has met the man she loves. His name is John Galt. Our question is why is Galt, and not Rearden or Francisco, is Dagny’s “final, irreplaceable choice.”

This is a complex question, but a large part of its answer becomes very clear once one collects the relevant passages. The focus in what follows, then, is on a selection of texts, which I take the liberty of quoting at some length.

The extended passage at the start of part III describing Dagny’s first encounter with Galt, when she awakens from the crash of her plane in the valley, will turn out to be one of our richest single sources of information, so I begin with it:

When she opened her eyes, she saw sunlight, green leaves and a man’s face. This was the world as she had expected to see it at sixteen—and now she had reached it—and it seemed so simple, so unastonishing, that the thing she felt was like a blessing pronounced upon the universe by means of three words: But of course.

She was looking up at the face of a man who knelt by her side, and she knew that in all the years behind her, *this* was what she would have given her life to see: a face that bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt. The shape of his mouth was pride, and more: it was as if he took pride in being proud. The angular planes of his cheeks made her think of arrogance, of tension, of scorn—yet the face had none of these qualities, it had their final sum: a look of serene determination and of certainty, and the look of a ruthless innocence which would not seek forgiveness or grant it. It was a face that had nothing to hide or to escape, a face with no fear of being seen or of seeing, so that the first thing she grasped about him was the intense perceptiveness of his eyes—he looked as if his faculty of sight were his best-loved tool and its exercise were a limitless, joyous adventure, as if his eyes imparted a superlative value to himself and to the world—to himself for his ability to see, to the world for being a place so eagerly worth seeing. It seemed to her for a moment that she was in the presence of a being who was pure consciousness—yet she had never been so aware of a man’s body. . . .

This was her world, she thought, this was the way men were meant to be and to face their existence—and all the rest of it, all the years of ugliness and struggle were only someone’s senseless joke. She smiled at him, as at a fellow conspirator, in relief, in deliverance, in radiant mockery of all the things she would never have to consider important again. He smiled in answer, it was the same smile as her own, as if he felt what she felt and knew what she meant.

“We never had to take any of it seriously, did we?” she whispered.

“No, we never had to.” (701–2)

After her return from the valley, in response to the remark that serves as the epigraph of this essay, Dagny says to Rearden:

It’s true. I’ve met the man I love and will always love. . . . What you meant to me can never be changed. But the man I met—he is the love I had wanted to reach long before I knew that he existed. . . . (861)

Readers of the novel have already been introduced to the love Dagny had wanted to reach long before she knew that he existed, in the scene in part I when she was in the dilapidated office of the John Galt Line, exhausted and lonely:

She stood, in a room of crumbling plaster, pressed to the windowpane, looking up at the unattainable form of everything she loved. She did not know the nature of her loneliness. The only words that named it were: This is not the world I expected.¹

Once, when she was sixteen, looking at a long stretch of Taggart track, at the rails that converged—like the lines of a skyscraper—to a single point in the distance, she had told Eddie Willers that she had always felt as if the rails were held in the hand of a man beyond the horizon—no, not her father or any of the men in the office—and some day she would meet him.

She shook her head and turned away from the window.

She went back to her desk. She tried to reach for the reports. But suddenly she was slumped across the desk, her head on her arm.

Don’t, she thought; but she did not move to rise, it made no difference, there was no one to see her.

This was a longing she had never permitted herself to acknowledge. She faced it now. She thought: If emotion is one’s response to the things the world has to offer, if she loved the rails, the building, and more: if she loved her love for them—there was still one response, the greatest, that she had missed. She thought: To find a feeling that would hold, as their sum, as their final expression, the purpose of all the things she loved on earth . . . To find a consciousness like her own, who would be the meaning of her world, as she would be of his . . . No, not Francisco d’Anconia, not Hank Rearden, not any man she had ever met or admired . . . A man who existed only in her knowledge of her capacity for an emotion she had never felt, but would have given her life to experience. (220)²

John Galt is that man—the love she has always wanted to meet—the consciousness like her own in a way that not even Francisco or Rearden is.

We see signs of this in Dagny's first response to Galt's face, quoted above, which echoes some of the last line of the passage we have just examined. Compare:

A man who existed only in her knowledge of her capacity for an emotion she had never felt, but would have given her life to experience. (220)

with:

She was looking up at the face of a man who knelt by her side, and she knew that in all the years behind her, *this* was what she would have given her life to see: (701)

Dagny's initial emotional response to Galt's face, and then to his person and his body, anticipates the full response she comes to have, across the early scenes in the valley, as she comes to learn more about, and to experience more of, him. To understand the nature and source of her full feeling for Galt—what Dagny means by “a consciousness like her own” and why she has found this in Galt, and only Galt—it will be useful to step back and examine a key nonfiction text in which Ayn Rand presents her (and Dagny's) view of the nature of (romantic) love.

Love is a response to values. It is with a person's sense of life that one falls in love—with that essential sum, that fundamental stand or way of facing existence, which is the essence of a personality. One falls in love with the embodiment of the values that formed a person's character, which are reflected in his widest goals or smallest gestures, which create the *style* of his soul—the individual style of a unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable consciousness. It is one's own sense of life that acts as the selector, and responds to what it recognizes as one's own basic values in the person of another. It is not a matter of professed convictions (though these are not irrelevant); it is a matter of much more profound, conscious *and subconscious* harmony.³

Our question, then, is this: What is Dagny's “essential sum,” her “fundamental stand or way of facing existence”? What are those basic values of hers that she recognizes in the person of Galt, values that are also his and which “are reflected in his widest goals [and] smallest gestures,” which create the very “*style* of his soul.”

For an answer, consider the following passages:

Dagny Taggart was nine years old when she decided that she would run the Taggart Transcontinental Railroad some day. She stated it to herself when she stood alone between the rails, looking at the two straight lines of steel that went off into the distance and met in a single point. What she felt was an arrogant pleasure at the way the track cut through the woods: it did not belong in the midst of ancient trees, among green branches that hung down to meet green brush and the lonely spears of wild flowers—but there it was. The two steel lines were brilliant in the sun, and the black ties were like the rungs of a ladder which she had to climb.

It was not a sudden decision, but only the final seal of words upon something she had known long ago. In unspoken understanding, as if bound by a

vow it had never been necessary to take, she and Eddie Willers had given themselves to the railroad from the first conscious days of their childhood. . . .

She never tried to explain why she liked the railroad. Whatever it was that others felt, she knew that this was one emotion for which they had no equivalent and no response. She felt the same emotion in school, in classes of mathematics, the only lessons she liked. She felt the excitement of solving problems, the insolent delight of taking up a challenge and disposing of it without effort, the eagerness to meet another, harder test. She felt, at the same time, a growing respect for the adversary, for a science that was so clean, so strict, so luminously rational. Studying mathematics, she felt, quite simply and at once: “How great that men have done this” and “How wonderful that I’m so good at it.” It was the joy of admiration and of one’s own ability, growing together. Her feeling for the railroad was the same: worship of the skill that had gone to make it, of the ingenuity of someone’s clean, reasoning mind, worship with a secret smile that said she would know how to make it better some day. She hung around the tracks and the round-houses like a humble student, but the humility had a touch of future pride, a pride to be earned. (50–51)

Note the excitement of using her mind to solve problems, to confront as an adversary something so demanding, “so luminously rational.” Note the worship of the skill, the ingenuity of someone’s clean, reasoning mind, that had gone to create mathematics—and the railroad. Note the pleasure in her future pride that she would do it even better some day. Note her startling independence (and self-esteem) in the next passage:

She was twelve years old when she told Eddie Willers that she would run the railroad when they grew up. She was fifteen when it occurred to her for the first time that women did not run railroads and that people might object. To hell with that, she thought—and never worried about it again. (51)

In the following passage, we get our first clear signs that the world around Dagny is not turning out as she had expected it to (and we will return to this); but note that reference is made again to the value to her of the joy of facing a worthy adversary, of superior ability:

At sixteen, sitting at her operator’s desk, watching the lighted windows of Taggart trains roll past, she had thought that she had entered her kind of world. In the years since, she learned that she hadn’t. The adversary she found herself forced to fight was not worth matching or beating; it was not a superior ability which she would have found honor in challenging; it was ineptitude—a gray spread of cotton that seemed soft and shapeless, that could offer no resistance to anything or anybody, yet managed to be a barrier in her way. She stood, disarmed, before the riddle of what made this possible. She could find no answer.

It was only in the first few years that she felt herself screaming silently, at times, for a glimpse of human ability, a single glimpse of clean, hard, radiant competence. She had fits of tortured longing for a friend or an enemy with a mind better than her own. (52)

Francisco d’Anconia was the one exception in her life then: her summers with him were a wonder of exploration, excitement, and passionate talk of their future plans, his for d’Anconia

Copper and hers for Taggart Transcontinental. Their first sexual experience was with each other. Afterwards,

[w]hen she came home, when she lay in bed, naked because her body had become an unfamiliar possession, too precious for the touch of a nightgown, because it gave her pleasure to feel naked and to feel as if the white sheets of her bed were touched by Francisco's body—when she thought that she would not sleep, because she did not want to rest and lose the most wonderful exhaustion she had ever known—her last thought was of the times when she had wanted to express, but found no way to do it, an instant's knowledge of a feeling greater than happiness, the feeling of one's blessing upon the whole of the earth, the feeling of being in love with the fact that one exists and in this kind of world; she thought that the act she had learned was the way one expressed it. (108)⁴

The feeling just described, which she learned the sexual act enabled her to express, embodies one aspect of her “fundamental stand or way of facing existence”: she faces it as one who loves the world in which she lives and the fact that she lives in it.

Related aspects are revealed in a pivotal scene, years later, in Rearden's office, while he and Dagny are discussing his new metal, which will revive her railroad:

“Did I tell you that I'm having tests made of communications wire of Rearden Metal?”

“I'm making so many tests that I'll never get through showing people what can be done with it and how to do it.”

They spoke of the metal and of the possibilities which they could not exhaust. It was as if they were standing on a mountain top, seeing a limitless plain below and roads open in all directions. But they merely spoke of mathematical figures, of weights, pressures, resistances, costs.

She had forgotten her brother and his National Alliance. She had forgotten every problem, person and event behind her; they had always been clouded in her sight, to be hurried past, to be brushed aside, never final, never quite real. *This* was reality, she thought, this sense of clear outlines, of purpose, of lightness, of hope. This was the way she had expected to live—she had wanted to spend no hour and take no action that would mean less than this.

She looked at him in the exact moment when he turned to look at her. They stood very close to each other. She saw, in his eyes, that he felt as she did. If joy is the aim and the core of existence, she thought, and if that which has the power to give one joy is always guarded as one's deepest secret, then they had seen each other naked in that moment. (87)

What has the power to give Dagny joy, is a world of great minds and achievements, of limitless possibilities, a world “of clear outlines, of purpose, of lightness, of hope,” a world in which every moment is *important*. This is the world as she had expected it, and the only world in which she is at home. But we can say more than that: this is Dagny's view of *reality*, as she herself thinks. What she is referring to is an aspect of what Rand calls a person's “implicit metaphysics,” expressed in his *sense of life* (see note 4 below). Rand explains further:

Long before he is old enough to grasp such a concept as metaphysics, man makes choices, forms value-judgments, experiences emotions and acquires a certain *implicit* view of life. Every choice and value-judgment implies some estimate of himself and of the world around him—most particularly, of his capacity to deal with the world. He may draw conscious conclusions, which may be true or false; or he may remain mentally passive and merely react to events (i.e., merely feel). Whatever the case may be, his subconscious mechanism sums up his psychological activities, integrating his conclusions, reactions or evasions into an emotional sum that establishes a habitual pattern and becomes his automatic response to the world around him. What began as a series of single, discrete conclusions (or evasions) about his own particular problems, becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit *metaphysics* with the compelling motivational power of a constant, basic emotion—an emotion which is part of all his other emotions and underlies all his experiences. *This* is a sense of life.⁵

The view of reality Dagny is experiencing is what Rand elsewhere calls “the benevolent universe premise” and its corresponding sense of life “a benevolent sense of life.” The benevolent universe premise is the view that this is a world open to man, in which great things are possible, in which success is the norm, and pain or suffering the accidental.⁶ Here is the clearest statement of Dagny’s form of this premise, notably expressed at a time when Dagny is under great duress and the possibility of future success seems hopeless:

But it is not true . . . that there is no place in the future for a superlative achievement of man’s mind; it can never be true. No matter what her problem, this would always remain to her—this immovable conviction that evil was unnatural and temporary. She felt it more clearly than ever this morning: the certainty that the ugliness of the men in the city and the ugliness of her suffering were transient accidents—while the smiling sense of hope within her at the sight of a sun-flooded forest, the sense of an unlimited promise, was the permanent and the real. (612)⁷

Understanding the deepening challenges to this premise that Dagny experiences throughout her life and her resulting internal conflict,⁸ helps us to understand the first two sentences Dagny and Galt say to each other, and what they portend for the depth and finality of her love for him. We will return to this shortly.

As a way of crystallizing the distinctive nature of Dagny’s love for Galt, let us return to the exchange between Rearden and Dagny with which we began, to see the limitations of her (authentic) love for Rearden as compared to her love for Galt. In response to Rearden’s report of his inference from the past tenses in the radio speech she has just returned from giving, Dagny confirms that she *has* met the man she “had wanted to reach long before she knew that he existed.” Consider Rearden’s reply and Dagny’s response:

“I think I’ve always known that you would find him. I knew what you felt for me, I knew how much it was, but I knew that I was not your final choice. What you’ll give him is not taken away from me, it’s what I’ve never had. I can’t rebel against it. What I’ve had means too much to me—and that I’ve had it, can never be changed.”

“Do you want me to say it, Hank? Will you understand it, if I say that I’ll always love you? . . . I’ve always seen you as you are now. That greatness of yours which you are just beginning to allow yourself to know—I’ve always known it and I’ve watched your struggle to discover it. Don’t speak of atonement, you have not hurt me, your mistakes came from your magnificent integrity under the torture of an impossible code—and your fight against it did not bring me suffering, it brought me the feeling I’ve found too seldom: admiration. If you will accept it, it will always be yours. What you meant to me can never be changed.” (861)

We have, in parts I and II of the novel, seen ample evidence of the intensity of Dagny’s feeling for Rearden. It comes out most dramatically during their ride together in the locomotive of the first run of the John Galt Line, which is well described in Greg Salmieri’s first essay (above, 242–43), and in the description of their first sexual encounter, as it takes place in Ellis Wyatt’s house:

Through all the steps of the years behind them, the steps down a course chosen in the courage of a single loyalty: their love of existence—chosen in the knowledge that nothing will be given, that one must make one’s own desire and every shape of its fulfillment—through the steps of shaping metal, rails and motors—they had moved by the power of the thought that one remakes the earth for one’s enjoyment, that man’s spirit gives meaning to insentient matter by molding it to serve one’s chosen goal. The course led them to the moment when, in answer to the highest of one’s values, in an admiration not to be expressed by any other form of tribute, one’s spirit makes one’s body become the tribute, recasting it—as proof, as sanction, as reward—into a single sensation of such intensity of joy that no other sanction of one’s existence is necessary. He heard the moan of her breath, she felt the shudder of his body, in the same instant. (252)

Why, then, is her feeling for him not total, why is he not her “final choice”? Clearly the first thing is the conflicts Rearden experiences, due to his philosophical errors. Though Dagny, as she says, has always seen him as he is at the time of her return from the valley, and greatly admires his struggle, and the virtues that characterize it, notice her first response to Galt’s face:

She was looking up at the face of a man who knelt by her side, and she knew that in all the years behind her, *this* was what she would have given her life to see: a face that bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt. The shape of his mouth was pride, and more: it was as if he took pride in being proud. (701)

Rearden, because of his conflicts, cannot be free of pain or fear or guilt in that way. Rearden also, for much of the time of their relationship, has not fully shared Dagny’s clean, holy view of sex. That perspective on sex is obviously a central value of Dagny’s: we see it as central to each of her sexual encounters that is narrated in the novel. (See, e.g., *Atlas*, 108, 252 [just quoted], and 956–57.) Rearden, by contrast, had developed a view of sexual desire as degrading, as a result of which he not only fails to share Dagny’s conscious valuation of sex, but condemns her for her desire for him (254). Furthermore, Rearden’s view of sexual desire as degrading and outside his volitional control results in a feeling (however mixed) of *self*-contempt (158–59, 254). Dagny, by contrast, “was completely incapable of experiencing a feeling of fundamental guilt” (87).

Contrast that with Galt, who is unadulteratedly proud of everything about himself, and even—as his face projects to Dagny—takes pride in being proud. This is an analogue of Dagny’s loving her love of her values (220). The unalloyed character of the qualities she loves is central to the man at the end of the tracks, and to her response to Galt.

Francisco, though, does not suffer from philosophical errors in that way, and he shares Dagny’s view of sex:

“Isn’t it wonderful that our bodies can give us so much pleasure?” he said to her once, quite simply. They were happy and radiantly innocent. They were both incapable of the conception that joy is sin. (108–9)⁹

But throughout most of the novel he is a paradox to Dagny, and the part she doesn’t understand prevents the sort of response she might well have given him, had they reached full adulthood in a rational world. More fundamental than that, though, is an insight Dagny reaches about her earlier response to Francisco. It occurs to her when she is with Francisco in the valley, at his house,

sitting together on the floor, bending over the sheets of paper he spread before her, studying the intricate sections of the smelter—with the same joyous earnestness they had once brought to the study of scraps in a junk yard.

She leaned forward just as he moved to reach for another sheet, and she found herself leaning against his shoulder. Involuntarily, she held still for one instant, no longer than for a small break in the flow of a single motion, while her eyes rose to his. He was looking down at her, neither hiding what he felt nor implying any further demand. She drew back, knowing that she had felt the same desire as his.

Then, still holding the recaptured sensation of what she had felt for him in the past, she grasped a quality that had always been part of it, now suddenly clear to her for the first time: if that desire was a celebration of one’s life, then what she had felt for Francisco had always been a celebration of her future, like a moment of splendor gained in part payment of an unknown total, affirming some promise to come. In the instant when she grasped it, she knew also the only desire she had ever experienced not in token of the future but of the full and final present. She knew it by means of an image—the image of a man’s figure standing at the door of a small granite structure. The final form of the promise that had kept her moving, she thought, was the man who would, perhaps, remain a promise never to be reached. (772)

This image has been a constant presence in Dagny’s mind since she experienced that man’s figure standing at the door of that structure.¹⁰ It will be worth quoting the narration of that experience of Dagny’s at length. The structure is, of course, the powerhouse that serves the valley, containing Galt’s motor, in operation.

She stood looking up at the structure, her consciousness surrendered to a single sight and a single, wordless emotion—but she had always known that an emotion was a sum totaled by an adding machine of the mind, and what she now felt was the instantaneous total of the thoughts she did not have to name, the final sum of a long progression, like a voice telling her by means of a feeling: If she had held onto Quentin Daniels, with no hope of a chance to use the motor, for the sole sake

of knowing that achievement had not died on earth—if, like a weighted diver sinking in an ocean of mediocrity, under the pressure of men with gelatin eyes, rubber voices, spiral-shaped convictions, non-committal souls and non-committing hands, she had held, as her life line and oxygen tube, the thought of a superlative achievement of the human mind—if, at the sight of the motor's remnant, in a sudden gasp of suffocation, as a last protest from his corruption-eaten lungs, Dr. Stadler had cried for something, not to look down at, but up to, and *this* had been the cry, the longing and the fuel of her life—if she had moved, drawn by the hunger of her youth for a sight of clean, hard, radiant competence—then here it was before her, reached and done, the power of an incomparable mind given shape in a net of wires sparkling peacefully under a summer sky, drawing an incalculable power out of space into the secret interior of a small stone hovel.

She thought of this structure, half the size of a boxcar, replacing the power plants of the country, the enormous conglomerations of steel, fuel and effort—she thought of the current flowing from this structure, lifting ounces, pounds, tons of strain from the shoulders of those who would make it or use it, adding hours, days and years of liberated time to their lives, be it an extra moment to lift one's head from one's task and glance at the sunlight, or an extra pack of cigarettes bought with the money saved from one's electric bill, or an hour cut from the work-day of every factory using power, or a month's journey through the whole, open width of the world, on a ticket paid for by one day of one's labor, on a train pulled by the power of this motor—with all the energy of that weight, that strain, that time replaced and paid for by the energy of a single mind who had known how to make connections of wire follow the connections of his thought. But she knew that there was no meaning in motors or factories or trains, that their only meaning was in man's enjoyment of his life, which they served—and that her swelling admiration at the sight of an achievement was for the man from whom it came, for the power and the radiant vision within him which had seen the earth as a place of enjoyment and had known that the work of achieving one's happiness was the purpose, the sanction and the meaning of life.

The door of the structure was a straight, smooth sheet of stainless steel, softly lustrous and bluish in the sun. Above it, cut in the granite, as the only feature of the building's rectangular austerity, there stood an inscription:

I SWEAR BY MY LIFE AND MY LOVE OF IT THAT I
WILL NEVER LIVE FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER MAN,
NOR ASK ANOTHER MAN TO LIVE FOR MINE.

She turned to Galt. He stood beside her; he had followed her, he had known that this salute was his. She was looking at the inventor of the motor, but what she saw was the easy, casual figure of a workman in his natural setting and function—she noted the uncommon lightness of his posture, a weightless way of standing that showed an expert control of the use of his body—a tall body in simple garments: a thin shirt, light slacks, a belt about a slender waistline—and loose hair made to glitter like metal by the current of a sluggish wind. She looked at him as she had looked at his structure.

Then she knew that the first two sentences they had said to each other still hung between them, filling the silence—that everything said since, had been said

over the sound of those words, that he had known it, had held it, had not let her forget it. (730–31)

Galt's incomparable mind, the scope and wonder of the material achievement of his motor, its power to expand life, to contribute so much to the joy which is man's birthright—all of this is real, in the present, before her, all captured in that effortlessness of posture that reflects his command of existence, his immense at-homeness in reality. All this is embodied in what Dagny sees at the powerhouse.

But there is one more thing she sees—which Galt, since their meeting, “had not let her forget.” It pertains to the conflict she could not resolve between the world she had expected to find at sixteen and the world in which she had been living—the “ocean of mediocrity” with their “non-committal souls” and their inexplicable ability to thwart or destroy great achievements such as the John Galt Line. The man she sees at the powerhouse is also the man whose superlative intelligence—philosophical as well as technological—has swept away that conflict. It is Galt who confirms what she knew in her deepest soul, that she never had to take any of those obstacles seriously. And it is Galt alone. Even Francisco says: “I saw no way to fight it. John found the way” (766). Galt identified the full Morality of Life, Galt identified the principle of the sanction of the victim, Galt created the strike, and Galt made it possible—made real—the valley, the world Dagny has expected, her Taggart Terminal (748). He is in every way the man at the end of the tracks.

To sum up our portrait of Dagny's basic values and way of facing existence, we must say that: The world for Dagny is a place in which joy is the natural state, in which man is at home, in which great things are possible. She is in love with the fact that she exists and in such a world. She loves man's ability to view that world from a height, to set important goals, to pursue them in a straight-line direction, to achieve them—and to take joy both in that achievement and in that which makes that achievement possible. She takes joy—and pride—in her own ability to understand a world so “luminously rational,” to take up ever growing challenges, against worthy adversaries, and to meet them, and to move on to more. In particular, she loves the ability to master the material realm, to bring one's spirit and one's vision of the joy—the glory—of shaping matter into the tools of man's life and pleasure—the rail and motors and “signal lights winking in the night” (51). Her symbol of all this was the man beyond the horizon, who held the rails in his hand, who, like the Taggart Terminal, was both a symbol and a destination—the man whose world she wanted to build and whom she expected to find when she had. Dagny is tortured by the contradiction between her conviction that this world is possible and the mounting evidence that it is not. Her search for the inventor of the motor and her worship of the mind that had created it were a manifestation both of her love of this world and her desperation for a solution. Galt, as we have seen, is the man who invented that motor, the man who held the rails in his hand, and the mind who found the solution and showed how her world was indeed possible, real, hers. He is the workman “with a weightless way of standing that showed an expert control of the use of his body—a tall body in simple garments: a thin shirt, light slacks, a belt about a slender waistline—and loose hair made to glitter like metal by the current of a sluggish wind.” He is the man who confirmed to her that “we never had to take any of it seriously.”¹¹

In the office of the John Galt Line, Dagny had longed “to find a consciousness like her own, who would be the meaning of her world, as she would be of his” (220). She found such a consciousness, in Galt. The joyous is the natural for Galt as well; he loves material achievement; he takes joy in his intellectual and technological powers. He has an unsurpassable love for existence and “pride in being its worthy lover” (1058, and see the coda to my other essay, above

pp. 391–93). And there is of course much more as one explores the concrete forms in which these values of Galt are expressed. (That there is much more in part explains the title of this essay.)

But until she learned that Galt’s is the way to practice the rule by which they have both always lived (732 and 813), they could not fully be “travelers . . . in the same direction” (1020) and therefore could not yet build a life together. At the end of the novel, as Dagny is riding on the plane, back to the valley, following the rescue of Galt,

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

Then they lay still, leaning back in their chairs, silently looking at each other. Then their persons filled each other’s awareness, as the sum and meaning of the future—but the sum included the knowledge of all that had had to be earned, before the person of another being could come to embody the value of one’s existence. (1159)¹²

NOTES

1. Notice the contrast with Dagny’s first thought, after she opened her eyes in the valley, in the passage just quoted.

2. Though Dagny is not here said to *love* the man at the end of the tracks, notice the following, from part II:

She felt—as she had felt it one spring night, slumped across her desk in the crumbling office of the John Galt Line, by a window facing a dark alley—the sense and vision of her own world, which she would never reach. . . . You—she thought—whoever you are, whom I have always loved and never found, you whom I expected to see at the end of the rails beyond the horizon, you whose presence I had always felt in the streets of the city and whose world I had wanted to build, it is my love for you that had kept me moving, my love and my hope to reach you and my wish to be worthy of you on the day when I would stand before you face to face. (633–34)

3. “Philosophy and Sense of Life,” in *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* (New York: Signet, 1975), 32. At the start of that essay Rand defines a sense of life as “a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It sets the nature of a man’s emotional responses and the essence of his character” (25). For further explanation of a *sense of life*, see below, 458.

4. This is the first appearance in *Atlas Shrugged* of Rand’s view of the meaning of sex. For a fuller picture, see (among other passages) the sex scene between Rearden and Dagny at Ellis Wyatt’s house, after the first run of the John Galt Line (252), and the conversation between Francisco and Rearden in Francisco’s suite (489–92) (a passage which is reprinted, under the heading “The Meaning of Sex,” in *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Signet, 1963), (98–101). See also, in Gregory Salmieri’s first essay above, 240–41.

5. “Philosophy and Sense of Life,” 25–26.

6. For more on this, see my *On Ayn Rand* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2000), chapters 1 and 11, and my chapter on the topic in Gotthelf and Salmieri, *Ayn Rand: A Companion to Her Works and Thought*. See also the passages from Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), and David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997) cited by Salmieri in “Discovering Atlantis” (above, 451 n. 19). See also the next note.

7. Dagny experiences the same feeling during and immediately after her ride on the first run of the John Galt Line. See above, in Salmieri, “Discovering Atlantis,” 422. Galt shares this premise, and expresses it himself, to Dagny, at 959–60.

8. See, for example, the passages cited above, 457, 459; these challenges and the conflict which results are brilliantly traced by Greg Salmieri in his essay “Discovering Atlantis.”

9. In the passage I have quoted from “Philosophy and Sense of Life,” Rand speaks of “the *style* of a soul.” This is a very subtle issue, and part of the full picture of Dagny’s preference for Galt, which I cannot get into here. It has to do, as Rand indicates, with the way a sense of life gets expressed. I mention only a teaser, which can serve as a lead to this issue. Back in the 1960s, during a brief conversation I had with Ayn Rand about the sense of life affinities between Dagny and Galt, she remarked that in sense of life, Dagny was closer to Rearden than to Francisco. For now, I leave it to you to consider what she meant.

10. Later that day:

She kept seeing his figure in her mind—his figure as he had stood at the door of the structure—she felt nothing else, no wish, no hope, no estimate of her feeling, no name for it, no relation to herself—there was no entity such as herself, she was not a person, only a function, the function of seeing him, and the sight was its own meaning and purpose, with no further end to reach. (733)

In this connection, recall, in Rand’s nonfiction remarks on love quoted above (455–56), the words “smallest gesture”: “One falls in love with the embodiment of the values that formed a person’s character, which are reflected in his widest goals or smallest gestures, which create the *style* of his soul—the individual style of a unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable consciousness.” Galt’s way of standing, and his entire physical presence, including of course his face, reflect for Dagny his unique, unrepeatable consciousness. Her response to him, from the moment she opens her eyes in the valley, is both to his body and to his soul—it is to the unified entity of body and soul which he is, and neither aspect should be underemphasized. See the long excerpt from that first meeting above, 453–54; for the full passage, worth comparing with the image she responds to at the powerhouse, see 730–31. See, too, the way the physical and the spiritual are merged in the characterization of what is embodied in Dagny’s response to Galt’s touch in their first sexual encounter, in the Taggart Terminal tunnel (956–57).

11. “Then she knew that the first two sentences they had said to each other still hung between them, filling the silence—that everything said since had been said over the sound of those words” (731).

12. With the kind permission of Wiley-Blackwell, this essay draws on material in two of my chapters in *Ayn Rand: A Companion to Her Works and Thought* (Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming). It has grown in depth and in the aptness of many of its formulations from discussion with Greg Salmieri, whose profound understanding of *Atlas Shrugged* has been a great help. Mary Ann Sures has also given me valuable editorial advice. A special thanks to Cassandra Brazié Love, who brought to my attention some thirty years ago the significance of the first two sentences said between Dagny and Galt for understanding why he is her “final choice.”